

Annual Report

April 2022 – March 2023



**ADOPT
LONDON
SOUTH**

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About Adopt London South

Context and responsibilities

This is the fourth Annual Report for the Adopt London South Partnership and its third full year of functioning, for the financial year 2022/23.

Adopt London South is a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) that was developed following legislative changes to the Education and Children Act (2016) which required local authorities to deliver their services through Regionalised Adoption Arrangements.

Adopt London South was formed on the 1st July 2019 and became an initial partnership consisting of 9 South London local authorities including LB Croydon, Royal Borough of Kingston & LB Richmond (operating as Achieving for Children), LB Lambeth, LB Lewisham, LB Merton, LB Southwark, LB Sutton and LB Wandsworth.

During 2021/22 a transition was planned for another partner to join. On 1st April 2022, Royal Borough of Greenwich was successfully transitioned to join the RAA making the 10th partner and Adopt London South became the largest partnership RAA in the country.

This transition happened with a variation to the Partnership Agreement which has been signed and sealed by all partners to extend the partnership until March 2029.

In addition, a range of Schedules were 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.

Adopt London South's Partnership Agreement sets out the legal and financial terms of the partnership and this is overseen by a Governance Board consisting of directors of the 10 partner agencies as well as a Quality Assurance Board.

Adopt London South have responsibilities in the following areas of adoption which are delivered on behalf of the 10 partner Local Authorities:

1. Recruitment, preparation, assessment and support of prospective adopter and adopters

CROYDON
www.croydon.gov.uk

ROYAL borough of
GREENWICH


THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF
KINGSTON
UPON THAMES


Lambeth


Lewisham

merton


 LONDON BOROUGH OF
RICHMOND UPON THAMES

Southwark
Council
southwark.gov.uk


Sutton

THE BRIGHTER BOROUGH
Wandsworth

2. Family finding for children in need of permanent homes through adoption
3. Provision of support to children, adopted adults, adoptive families and other people affected by the adoption process

Whilst Adopt London South undertake family finding activities, the responsibility for the child (including corporate parenting responsibilities) remain with the local authority, therefore the individual local authorities remain responsible for the decisions in respect of a child's journey through care planning, court and decision for permanence for a child.

Governance arrangements

The Adopt London South Governance Board meets quarterly. This Board is chaired by the Director of Children's Services (DCS) of the host authority (LB Southwark) and has representation at Director level from each of the partner Local Authorities. This Board has responsibility for all partnership decisions that require sign off above Head of Service level, and for monitoring the performance and financial management of Adopt London South.

The Quality Assurance Group (QA group) meets monthly and has membership at Head of Service and / or Service Manager level from each partner borough. The QA Board has responsibility to monitor and improve partnership working across the Local Authorities and Adopt London South including making decisions and proposals about practice and procedures that relate to adoption work across the agencies and to ensure timely outcomes for children with plans for adoption. The QA group also considers emerging information about differences in practice between the 10 Local Authorities, and where best practice can be implemented across all partnership. 2022/23 has seen some key areas of focus for the QA Group including:

- Learning from a Cumbria Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review into the death of Leiland-James Corkill, who was murdered by his prospective adoptive parents.
- Effective information sharing processes.

- Learning from legal advice and case law relating to Agency Decision Maker (ADM) processes.
- Development of process for foster carers and connected people who want to adopt.

The 4 Adopt London RAAs North, South, East and West, covering 24 London Authorities work collaboratively with development work across this area being undertaken by the 4 Adopt London Heads of Service.

Staffing

Adopt London South employs 68 staff members. The staff work in specialist teams across the service.

ALS has a stable workforce and most changes in the workforce come about as a result of development and growth opportunities.

Additionally, Adopt London South continue to have work supported by experienced Independent Social Works for a range of assessments and timely, quality service provision to Adopted Adults as needed. This approach enables agility and flexibility within the service to respond to the peaks and troughs of demand with maximum cost efficiencies being considered throughout.

Inspections

ALS participate in the adoption elements of the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) and focussed inspections pertaining to permanency or children in care that take place within of our partner local authorities. In 2022/23 we were involved in 3 inspections for Wandsworth, Southwark and Lambeth.

Adoption inspection regulations have not been updated to reflect the creation of Regional Adoption Agencies and currently, local authority inspections only look at some areas of adoption work. As a result, the Department for Education (DfE) and Ofsted have announced plans to pilot direct inspections of Regional Adoption Agencies towards the end of 2023. Ofsted have not yet published an inspection framework but

we understand they intend to inspect six RAAs nationally as part of the pilot, and to publish one composite report which focuses on emerging themes rather than naming findings in relation to individual RAAs. When the pilot is complete Ofsted and the DfE will consider possible regulatory change to normalise RAA inspections.

Outcomes

Adopt London South is committed to working to improve outcomes for children who have a plan for adoption and for children living in their adoptive homes in the following areas. More can be read about each area by following the links or by further reading of this annual report.

Finding prospective adoptive parents	<p>Increase the proportion of prospective adopters who are of Black and mixed Black ethnicity, in line with the needs of our Black and mixed Black ethnicity children in South London.</p>
Preparing and approving adoptive parents	<p>Improve timeliness and effectiveness in matching in-house approved adopters with children.</p> <p>Assess, prepare, and support prospective adopters to a high standard so that they are fully equipped to successfully parent an adoptive child.</p>
Planning for children	<p>Ensure all children who would benefit from adoption are identified appropriately during Permanency Planning processes.</p> <p>Ensure that children who would benefit from an Early Permanence placement are identified early and matched with adoptive parents who have been prepared for Early Permanence.</p>
Placing children with adoptive parents	<p>Ensure effective and time-sensitive family finding for children with a plan for adoption.</p> <p>Increase the proportion of in-house and local adoptive placements.</p>
Providing support to adoptive families and others	<p>Improve consistency and timeliness in providing support for adoptive families.</p> <p>Increase awareness and uptake of support services amongst adoptive families to build resilience and reduce the need for crisis support.</p> <p>Provide specialist and targeted support to adoptive families with the most acute needs to reduce family breakdown.</p>

Financial spend 2022/23

The ALS 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 eventual 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 past year (2022/23) a new approved model has been applied to include the continuation of an interim “smoothing” arrangement which will be in place until the end of the 2023/24 financial year.

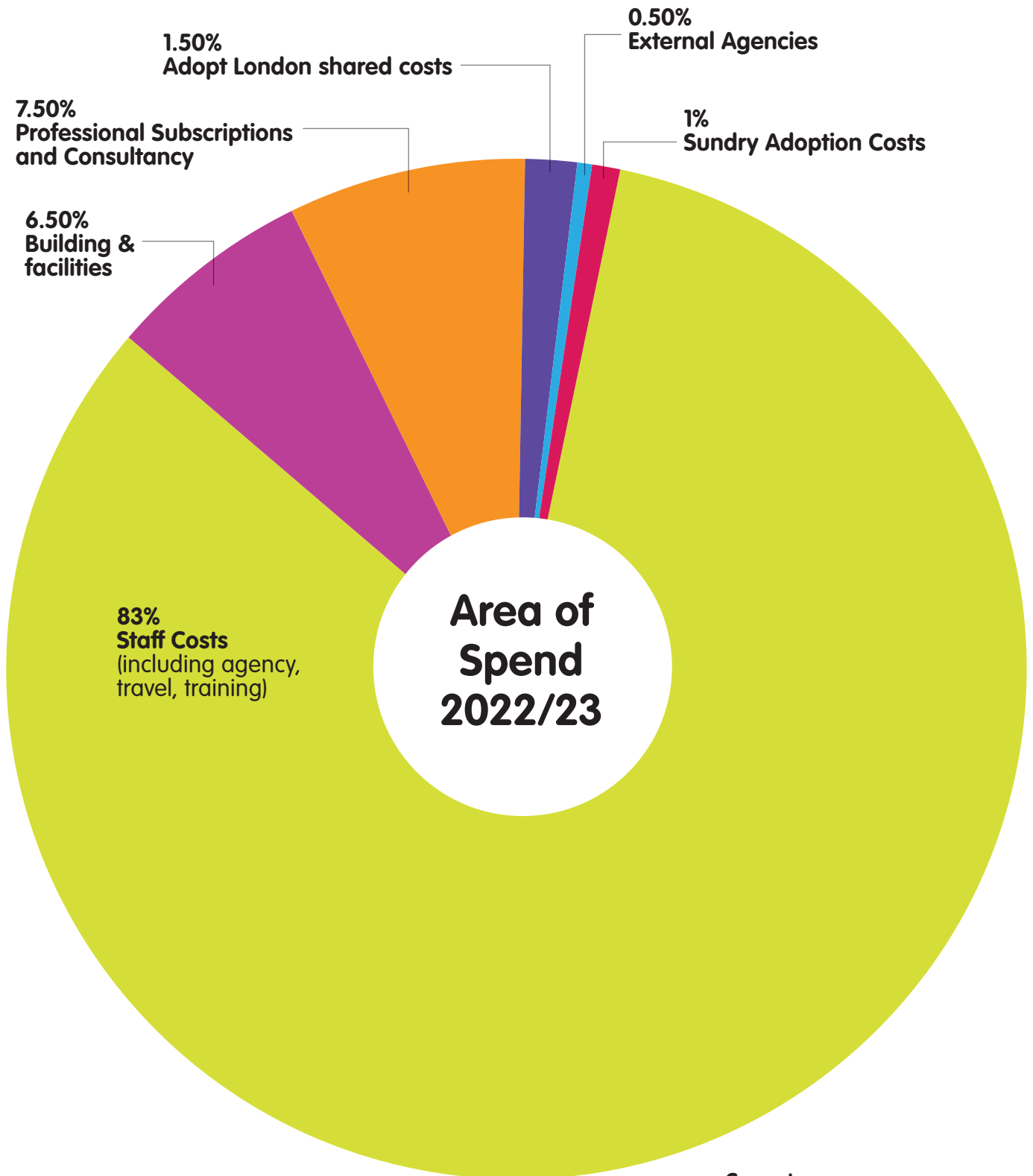
As a new partner, Royal Greenwich have joined on a fully demand-based funding model since 1st April 2022.

The 2022/23 partner contributions as per the model described above are reflected in the table below:

Croydon	£676,404
Greenwich	£492,335
Kingston and Richmond (operating as Achieving for Children)	£410, 560
Lambeth	£441,947
Lewisham	£594,100
Merton	£327,801
Southwark	£525,174
Sutton	£378,700
Wandsworth	£378,392



The total budget for ALS in 2022/23 was £4,225,411. This includes staffing costs as well as costs for commissioned services, facilities and adoption-related expenses.



	Current year budget (£'000)
Staff Costs (including agency, travel, training)	3,548
Building and Facilities	277
Professional Subscriptions and Consultancy	322
Adopt London Shared Costs	70
External Agencies	20
Sundry Adoption Costs	38

National adoption landscape

National RAA Leaders Group

The 32 Regional Adoption Agencies in England work together under the umbrella 'The National RAA Leaders Group', soon to be rebranded in Autumn 2023 to 'Adoption England'. The Leaders Group has a Strategic Lead and several project leads focused on developing particular areas of practice nationally and coordinating the work of RAAs. The Leaders Group has been tasked by the Department of Education with developing the strategic priorities it identified within its adoption strategy 'Achieving Excellence Everywhere' (2021) and provided with funding to progress this work. These priorities focus on developing national standards in recruitment, matching, and support; looking at alternative models of matching practice; increasing the use of early



regional
adoption
agencies

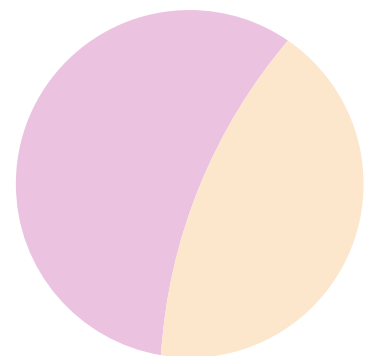
permanence placements; developing multi-disciplinary support; and considering models for national and pan-regional commissioning in adoption support. In addition, the Leaders Group is focused on raising the voices of those with different lived experiences of adoption, and on increasing representation of all forms of diversity within adoption services. Whilst much of this work is being progressed nationally, Adopt London have also been successful at accessing grant funding from the National RAA Leaders Group to progress priorities that align with the DfE strategy.



Death of Leiland-James Corkill in Cumbria

Leiland-James was placed for adoption aged 7 months in August 2020. He had been removed from the care of his birth family following care proceedings and he was placed with foster carers from the age of 2 months. In January 2021 Leiland-James died as a result of a catastrophic head injury at the hands of his prospective adoptive parents. In May 2022 the prospective adoptive mother was found guilty of his murder. During the trial she was found to have lied about her alcohol use, mental health, physical health, family debts, and attitude to physical chastisement. In July 2022 Cumbria Safeguarding Children's Partnership published their report following a Child Safeguarding Practice Review, and recommendations for Regional Adoption Agencies have recently been published. There is significant learning from this tragic and horrifying case and RAA's are working collectively to implement changes to practice which will reduce the risk of a similar set of circumstances occurring in future. The recommended changes to be explored include:

- Ensuring medical practitioners understand their safeguarding responsibilities in adoption cases, and that updating information is sought from medical records at different stages of the process.
- Providing opportunities to listen to the voice of the child at different stages of the adoption process (in this case the adoptive parents had a birth child who would have been old enough to speak with social workers and might have provided some insight).
- Letting personal referees know that they have a safeguarding responsibility and should make contact with the adoption agency if they have concerns.
- More strenuously seeking references from therapeutic providers with an emphasis on their role in safeguarding, as some providers refuse to provide a reference on the grounds of patient confidentiality.
- Better understanding of prospective adopters financial affairs.



Adopt London



Adopt London structure

Four separate RAA's work closely together under the 'Adopt London' umbrella covering the different geographic regions in London, and providing services to 24 London Boroughs in total. Adopt London are unique nationally in working in such a close partnership across a large number of local authorities.

Through this partnership we aim to develop a London-wide profile for the recruitment of adoptive parents, improve services that benefit from economies of scale, and share and standardise best practice. The host boroughs for Adopt London are Southwark for the South, Islington for the North, Havering for the East, and Ealing for the West. Heads of Service, Service Managers, Team Managers, Panel Advisors, and Marketing & Communications leads all work closely with their peers across Adopt London to develop shared services and practice standards.

Heads of Service across Adopt London, the host borough Directors and Directors of Children's Services meet quarterly as the Adopt London Executive Advisory Board chaired by a non-host partner DCS. The Executive Advisory Board oversees the joint project work of Adopt London, supports with problem solving, and considers Adopt London issues that need the support of other senior leaders to resolve.

The Executive Advisory Board has written to all the 24 boroughs seeking to assure the governance of Adopt London projects, assets and the shared website, (AdoptLondon.org.uk), social media through an Adopt London



Legal Partnership Agreement which is being led by Adopt London West. The securing of this agreement would also formalise the responsibilities of the Executive Advisory Board for Adopt London. Due to capacity issues, this work has been paused during 2022/23 with a view to restarting in 2023/24.

Adopt London activity

The Adopt London Heads of Service work towards a strategic work plan that is supported by the Executive Advisory Board. The plan covers governance and commissioning arrangements; operational and practice development of priority areas including opportunities to access national funding; marketing and communications arrangements; and the voice of adopters, adopted children, adopted adults, and birth family members. A pooled budget is held to fund shared activity. These were some of our shared areas of work in 2022/23:

Matching project: Adopt London have been awarded funds from the National RAA Leaders Group to test methods for improving shared practice for matching children in need of adoption with adoptive families. This has led to the creation of Adopt London Matching Manager and Matching Coordinator posts to lead the shared work.

Early Permanence: A number of Early Permanence projects have been funded by the National Adoption Strategic Team to improve our understanding and practice in Early Permanence. Adopt London and another London RAA have been awarded funds to better understand and improve practice in Early Permanence. As part of the London Early Permanence project, research has been undertaken into the barriers to Early Permanence in London. The researchers carried out over 40 interviews with those involved in Early Permanence decision-making in London, including Agency Decision Makers, Heads of Service, legal representatives, members of the judiciary, CAFCASS Guardians, and Regional and Voluntary Adoption Agencies. The research highlighted trends that London is consistently

the region with the lowest use of both adoption and Early Permanence in England, but also used Special Guardianship Orders below the national average – suggesting low levels of adoption are not directly related to high levels of Special Guardianship placements. Some of the key barriers to Early Permanence identified in the research were:

- Low levels of confidence in Early Permanence practice partially because adoptions themselves are so rare.
- Care proceedings delays which are acute in London increase the uncertainty and risk in Early Permanence placements.
- The strong emphasis on adoption as a last resort within London courts has an impact on both adoption and Early Permanence rates.
- Gaps in case tracking and Early Permanence planning can result in missed opportunities for the use of Early Permanence.
- A shortage of Early Permanence carers ready for placements, so not all referred children can be placed through this route.

A number of recommendations have been made which will be taken forward in the next phase of the project, including workshops for borough staff and engagement with judiciary and CAFCASS with an overall view to improving the Early Permanence picture across London where this is an appropriate plan for a child.

Black Adoption Project: We completed the first phase of this large, long-term project to improve adoption for Black children and families and have started preparing to initiate and evaluate practice pilots based on the outcomes of phase 1.

Adult adoptee support: Adult adoptee support: We are working with adult adoptees to expand the availability of support groups in London. A new group specifically for transracially adopted adults was set up in this period in partnership with the Transracial Adult Adoptee Network (TAAN).

Agency Decision Maker workshops: Funded by the National RAA Leaders Group, Adopt London ran a development workshop for London Agency Decision Makers to reflect on case law, guidance, and best practice around Best Interests Decisions.

Adopt London Choir: Founded during the 2020 pandemic, the choir is made up of London adoptive parents who meet weekly online to sing and network, and sometimes meet in person to perform at events. The choir has proven to be a strong source of support for many parents. You can watch some of their videos on the Adopt London YouTube channel.

Marketing & Communications: Our marketing and communications leads pool their time and resources to provide a shared Adopt London public presence, including our website and social media. A single public profile is particularly effective for the recruitment of prospective adoptive parents.

Adopt London staff event: We hosted our second annual in-person event in February 2023 for 150 Adopt London members of staff to increase relationships and co-working across the Adopt London RAAs. The event focused on the importance of our use of language in our work led by our guest speaker – renowned Clinical Psychologist, Trainer and bestselling author, Dr Karen Treisman MBE.

We Are Family: We continue to have a strong partnership with adopter peer network charity We Are Family, which provides support groups

across London, a specialist webinar programme, and podcast.

In addition to continuing work in these areas, our priorities for further shared work in 2023/34 are:

Adopter voice: We are working towards developing a strong mechanism for gathering and responding to adoptive parent feedback, and for consulting with parents on service developments.

Adopted children and young people's groups: Adopt London South currently run two Adoptables Groups for 8-12's and 13-18. We are planning to replicate the model as well as expand social groups for adopted children and young people across the Adopt London area to provide social opportunities and invite participation.

Shared commissioning arrangements in adoption support: We have received funding from the National RAA Leaders Group to scope potential improvements to commissioning arrangements, particularly in relation to provision under the Adoption Support Fund. In the long term this work could increase the effectiveness of our arrangements whilst reducing the currently extensive administration.

The Black Adoption Project



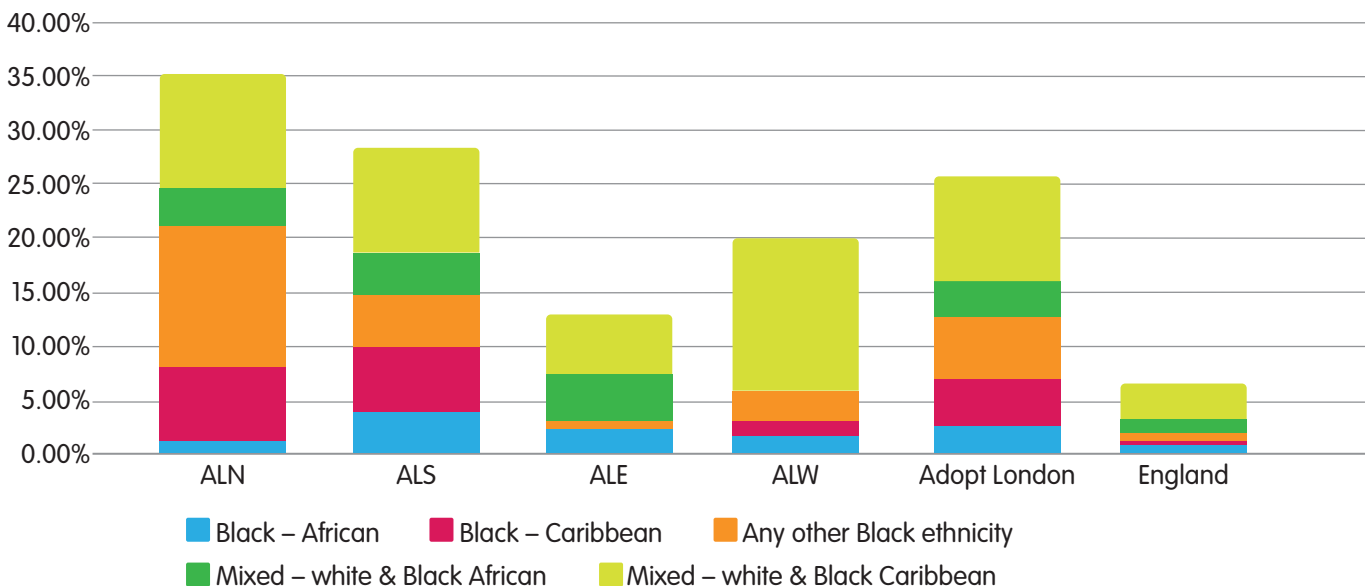
The Black Adoption Project aims to improve adoption for Black children and families and is a partnership project between Adopt London and Laurelle Brown Training & Consultancy. We have now completed phase 1 of the Project and have a strong governance structure established with a wide range of representatives covering professional, community, and lived experience of Black adoption – including adult adoptees, care experienced adults, and adoptive parents.

Our initial research is detailed in our Phase 1 Report, which evidences the disparities for Black children in the adoption system and pinpoints where these disparities are occurring. It also looks at the experiences of Black prospective adoptive parents, and Black community

perceptions of adoption. Some of our key findings are:

- Black children who have a plan of adoption agreed by the court are much less likely than other children to go on to be adopted, and this seems to be most often because suitable adoptive parents couldn't be identified.
- Black children who are adopted wait much longer to move into their adoptive family.
- Black prospective adopters are more likely to drop out during the assessment process and not go on to adopt a child.
- Some of the most significant barriers to adoption for Black prospective adopters are financial factors, negative experiences

Black children placed for adoption as a total of all children placed for adoption in the 5 year period 2016/17 – 2020/21



or perceptions of the assessment process, the need for more support after adoption (including culturally informed support), and the impact of racism.

In the five year period studied, Adopt London South placed the second highest proportion of Black and mixed Black ethnicity children for adoption compared to other Adopt London RAAs. Across Adopt London on average 25.8% of children placed for adoption were of Black or mixed Black ethnicity backgrounds. We found that Black children with a Placement Order were 20% less likely to have been successfully placed for adoption than children of other ethnicities. Black Caribbean children particularly were 12 times more likely than other children to have 'prospective adopters could not be found' given as the reason for a change of care plan away from adoption. When other factors were held constant, Black children spent on average 6½ - 8 months longer in the adoption process before moving in with their adoptive family, and the most substantial delays occurred during the family finding process – again suggesting that significant delay is caused by difficulties identifying suitable prospective adopters.

Within the research we also looked at the journey for Black prospective adoptive parents and found that Black-only households were 5-6 more likely than white-only households to leave the adoption process without adopting a child, indicating that there are difficulties during the assessment phase that need to be considered further.

During 2022/23 we organised workshops with a wide range of stakeholders, including adopted young people, to develop a Theory of Change – a document which articulates the things that aren't working currently, and the goals of the project. The research findings and Theory of

Change process led directly to some options for creating change. The pilot proposals target different areas of practice including:

- Services to increase retention of Black prospective adopters both at the initial enquiry stage, and later during the assessment process.
- Exploring ways to reduce the economic barriers to adoption.
- Specialist learning and development programme for adoptive parents of Black children.
- Community-led approach to raise awareness of adoption and ultimately to recruit more Black adoptive parents.
- Research into the significance and availability of Black therapists providing support under the Adoption Support Fund.
- Social, participatory, and educational groups for Black adopted young people.

In the next phase of work we will be initiating a number of pilot projects across these different areas of practice, and evaluating the impact these changes have on Black children and families.

Alongside the research and practice change is activity focusing on the importance of workforce development and support for Black staff members. We have been running monthly 'Safe Space Sessions' for Black staff to reflect on their work within adoption and discuss experiences that impact and shape the workplace and practice.

We have run whole-staff development training, and a series of workshops focused on learning from Black adoptees on their experiences of adoption. In the next phase of work we will be developing more ongoing programmes of support for staff to help create and embed change.

Black Adoption Project goals

- Levelled playing field for Black **families**.
- Reimagined **system** for Black children.
 - Black **communities** understand and care about adoption.
 - Black adopted **children** have the support they need.
 - Confident, anti-racist and culturally-competent **workforce**.

The Adoption Panel

Structure of the Adoption Panel

Adopt London South run 2 Adoption and Permanence Panels which oversees and makes recommendations on:

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

Any panel recommendations relation to children are presented to the Agency Decision Maker in the child's borough for the final decision to ratify the panel recommendation or not. All approval decisions relating solely to prospective adopters are presented to the Agency Decision Maker in ALS.

The panel meets 4 times per month and occasionally meets more frequently if the needs of the service require this. There are 2 Independent Panel Chairs and a central membership list consisting of members with differing experiences relating to adoption and permanence to ensure robust oversight of the work of ALS and consistency around decision-making. The independent panel membership is diverse in terms of their experiences of adoption, their age, gender, relationship status, and

ethnicity and care is taken to ensure diversity across each panel as far as possible. Social workers from ALS and partner boroughs also sit on the panel regularly. We hope to improve the balance of gender and ethnic diversity of the social workers attending in the future. The panel have regular training and there is a programme of annual appraisals. The panel provide quality assurance feedback to ALS and the relevant local authority for every case they consider.





Views of the independent Adoption Panel Chairs

The two Panel Chairs (Shirley Walker and Josephine Scorer) work together to provide a report of Panel business every six months. The report covers the activity of the Panel, a summary of quality assurance feedback, and areas for improvement and development. The most recent report covering the period September 2022 – March 2023, they provided commentary on a number of areas including panel stability, positive and strong working relationships between the Chairs, panel advisors and panel coordinators. They detail the efficiency of the panel processes, the volume and the quality of the work presented to panel and the outcomes for the children and prospective adopters with a focus on ensuring that work remains in line with the National Minimum Standards.

Their conclusion is as follows:

“The number of cases presented to the panel has remained fairly consistent despite some case withdrawals leading to cancelled panels. Although there has been fewer early permanence approval during this period the adoption approvals have remained consistent. It is particularly pleasing to note the high number of matches presented to panel during this period signifying the hard work throughout the partner boroughs to increase permanence for their children through adoption.”

Recommendations arising from Panel Chair reports are reviewed in quarterly meetings between the Panel Chairs, Panel Advisors and Head of Service.

Training for local authority social workers

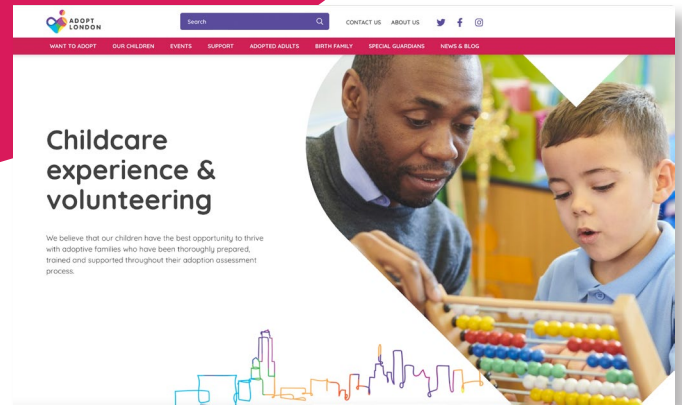
ALS have offered the 'Moving to Adoption' (UEA Model) Training. This was piloted in Lambeth in early 2023 and has since been further developed and updated. This training will be rolled out over 2023/2024

There has been a shifting landscape in the workforce across the partnership which has necessitated regular opportunities for development. ALS are responsive and provide bespoke opportunities to individual teams as required to work with colleagues to develop deeper insights into the adoption process where necessary.

ALS had been running monthly Early Permanence Lunch and Learn sessions to support LA's to have a better understanding of Early Permanence with the last one being delivered in April 2022. This work has since become part of the Adopt London Early Permanence project, however, individual training has been offered to one Local Authority within the partnership to meet an identified need.



Finding prospective adoptive parents



Adopt London brand

Our single Adopt London public presence makes it easy for anyone considering adoption in London to find Adopt London and provides prospective adopters with a clear and transparent choice between agencies. Pooling communications resources means that Adopt London can spend less whilst still maintaining a professional, creative, and current online presence.

We have a shared recruitment and communications strategy. Through the Adopt London brand we aim to celebrate the diversity of London, to demonstrate that London children are central to our agencies, and to highlight a range of voices impacted by adoption.

The **website** is at the heart of Adopt London's communication and usually the first contact point for people considering adoption. Articles, blogs, news, and up-to-date information is accessible on the website with several new pages and content reviews being introduced during the year. In 2022/23 we undertook significant development work in the systems side of the website to ensure it is compliant with local government standards and began a programme of work to improve accessibility.

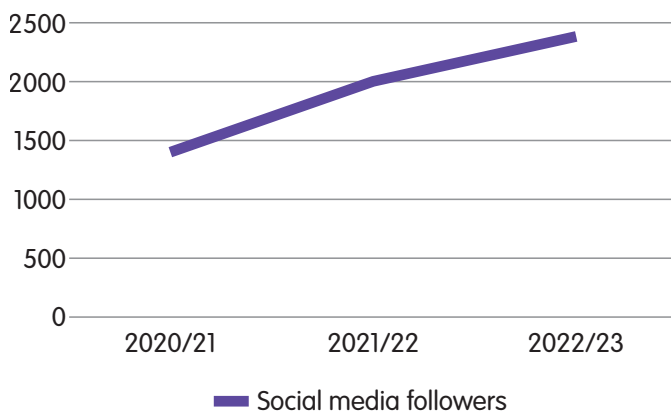
Visits to the website are most often initiated by an organic search online (50% of visits), people entering the address directly into the browser (27%) and through links from other websites (20%). In total there were 46,647 website sessions during the year, a decrease from 58,696 in

2021/22. Other website engagement measures such as number of new users and page views were also reduced this year. This may be due to our focus on systems development this year with deliberately less promotion of new articles and features on the site as we have tried to manage high demand in our Recruitment & Assessment Team; but also may in part reflect wider patterns in adoption recruitment driven by the 'cost of living crisis'. From those who provided feedback after attendance at Adoption Information Meetings this year, a large number said they chose to attend an ALS session because they live in one of the partner boroughs. Another key deciding factor was that they made the decision after searching online – emphasising the importance of a strong website presence and search engine optimisation investment.

The Adopt London social media channels post regularly to communicate and inform a range of audiences impacted by adoption. Our social media followers continue to organically increase and using these channels can be an effective way to engage and support people in London who are considering adoption but not yet ready to begin an assessment.

For the second year we have produced an original podcast series 'Adoption Shared' in partnership with We Are Family, our adopter peer support partners. In 2022/23 we published the third season, with episodes focused on

Social media followers



Black adoption from different perspectives. The podcast has been successful at providing another way for us to engage, support, develop, and build loyalty with those considering adoption who are not yet ready to begin an assessment. Episodes are also used in preparing and training prospective adopters and in building community for adoptive parents.

The first three seasons of Adoption Shared have now been downloaded 8,284 times. A fourth season is being prepared for release in 2023/24 focused on adoption experiences for children with additional support needs.



Enquiries and providing information

We have continued to run Adoption Information Meetings virtually this year largely due to the success of these sessions which were initiated virtually as a result of the pandemic as well as by receiving positive feedback about the ease of access to these sessions and the effectiveness at sharing a large amount of information. However, in autumn 2022 we developed a waiting list of prospective adopters who had attended initial meetings and were ready to start their assessment. Capacity issues, within the Recruitment & Assessment team as a result of an increase in other areas of this team's work meant that the number of Adoption Information Meetings reduced between December 2022 – March 2023 to ensure we could allocate and provide a good assessment service for households who were already on our waiting list. For this reason, the numbers attending sessions is reduced significantly this year.

We have also continued to deliver our popular monthly Meet the Adopter sessions virtually this year. The virtual delivery means that it is possible for us to have a wide range of diverse adoptive parents speaking about their experiences, as childcare demands would limit

“The event was informative, transparent and clear on the types of child and types of adopters you were looking for as well as the support offered in the process.” (Dec 22)

“Felt informed and satisfied with advice and experience suggested and shared.” (Nov 22)

“I really enjoyed the event. It was very informative, encouraging and really well thought out. Great Q+A session and really warm and friendly hosts. I could've stayed longer than the 2hrs the meeting ran for! It was great.” (Oct 22)

“Clear information provided, guided through the next part of the process with excellent insight.” (Jul 22)

“Three people from the African and Caribbean background recommended this agency and I feel it is professional.” (Nov 22)

“I liked the range of topics covered during the event. I liked the structure and the way maybe complex information was presented and explained simply. It was great to be able to ask questions and the hosts were really flexible with their time.” (Oct 22)

speakers if sessions were delivered in person. Our adoptive parent speakers have a wide range of experiences including those who have adopted younger and older children, had siblings placed at the same time and siblings who have joined the adoptive family separately; some have adopted through Early Permanence, as a single parent, or as a couple in a same-sex or heterosexual relationship, or as an older parent, significantly we also try to ensure we have the perspective of Black adopters also. Two or three speakers attend each session and questions are thrown open to those considering adoption. Due to the wide range of speakers, these sessions highlight to prospective adopters that there is not just one valid 'adopter experience' and provide

a realistic and balanced view of the joys and challenges of adoption. Some of our prospective adopters have attended sessions regularly throughout their assessment and this has enriched their preparation.

Due to our pause in running Information Sessions and accepting applications during the second half of the year, there were many households who made an enquiry with us but were unable to take the process further. Overall enquiry numbers were lower than last year, which may reflect the external factors that impact consideration of adoption, such as increases in cost of living.

Prospective adopter enquiries

Number of households who...	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Made an enquiry	1105	1119	816
Signed up to an information session	558	624	340
Attended an information session	No data	435	189
Submitted an Expression of Interest application	102	158	88
Started Stage 1 assessment	44	65	30

Preparing and approving adoptive parents

After an increase in 2021/22, the number of approvals of new adoptive families has decreased again. There are a range of contributing factors such as increased demands from other areas of work as well as the complexity of assessments since the Covid-19 pandemic which is also reflected nationally. This appears to be due to increased difficulty and challenge in family life – for example more applicants have experience of mental health difficulties, shortened fertility treatment cycles, recent bereavement, and job instability or redundancy. These complexities impact the assessment process in different ways but can mean that the assessment needs to be slower,

that families might need to take a break or drop out of the process, or that professional counselling support may be needed before an assessment can progress.

ALS have recruited the largest number of adoptive households across the four Adopt London RAA's and the decision to pause recruitment to meet other demands across the service has impacted on the approval rates this year.

Adoptive household approvals

2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
54	58	48



Referrals from boroughs for adoption assessments of foster carers and connected people (who wish to adopt children known to them or already in their care) have remained stable year. A process for referral and joint decision making between the borough and ALS for foster carer assessments has been developed and will start to be used, pending agreement across the partnership. Foster carer assessments can bring their own complexities and often encounter delays. There are also some occasions when plans change after the assessment is completed.

Total number of foster carer and connected persons assessments

2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
14	6	7

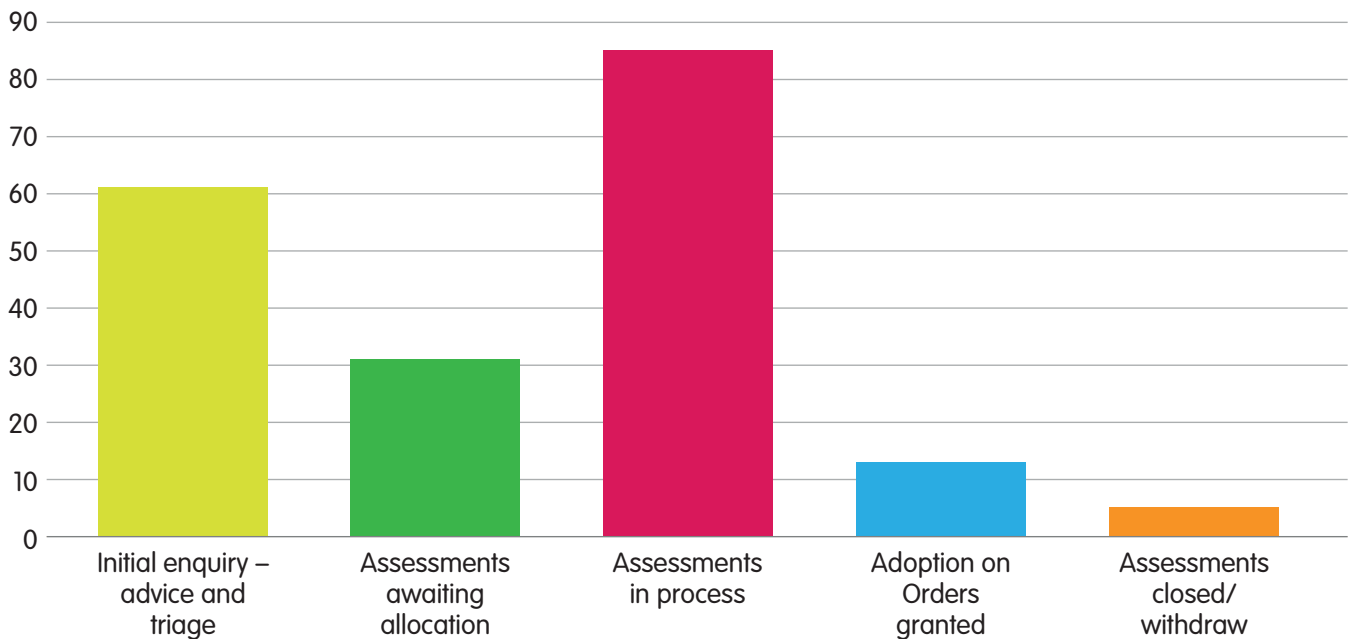
On behalf of the partner boroughs, ALS are legally required to provide advice and assess any resident who wishes to privately apply for an Adoption Order for a child in their care (non-

agency adoption). This can include adoption by a step-parent, by a same-sex partner where both partners were not registered as parents on the birth certificate, in surrogacy cases, for Special Guardians who wish to convert to an Adoption Order, and in some family care arrangements. A high proportion of these cases involve international elements because an Adoption Order is often advised by solicitors as being a way to formalise the legal status of a family arrangement when resolving immigration difficulties. Many of these family situations and circumstance are increasing in legal complexity.

ALS offer consultation with those who enquire about non-agency adoption to advise on the suitability of an adoption application and in many cases to suggest alternative ways of gaining the legal security needed. Despite this, there are an increasing number of cases which do go on to require allocation for full assessment.

The graphic below details the information for financial year 2022/2023

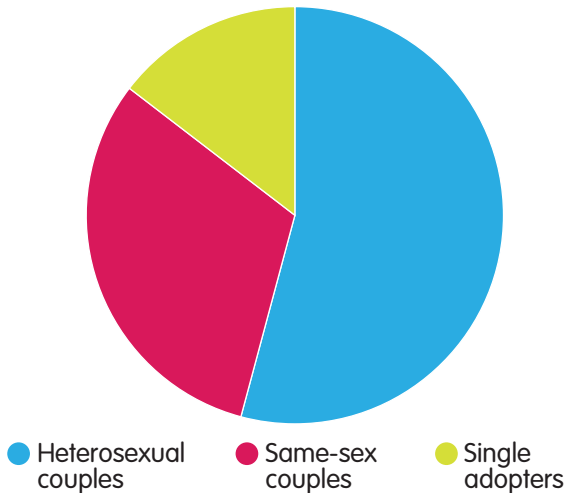
Non-Agency Assessments 2022/2023



Characteristics of approved adopters

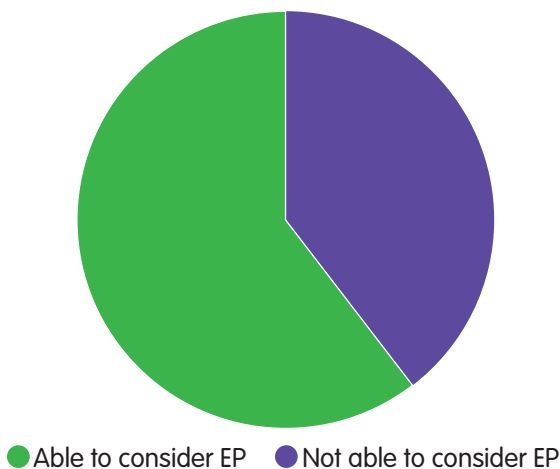
Approved adoptive households were diverse in terms of their family structure. The greatest proportion were 2-parent households. 54% being heterosexual couples, 31% being single-sex couples and 15% being single parent households.

Family Structure of Approved Adopters 2022/23



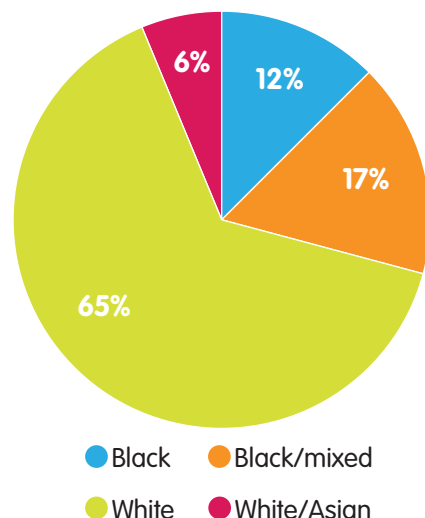
Of all of the approved adopters, 39% of adopters have been dually approved to be Early Permanence carers compared to 61% who have not chosen to be considered for Early Permanence.

Approved adopters able to consider Early Permanence



There has been a focus on improving recruitment of black adopters. This year 29% of the households approved were from a black/black mixed household and we ALS will be seeking to work towards improving this through the recommendations from the first phase of the Black Adoption Project in order to meet the needs of our children waiting.

Approved adopters by ethnicity



Planning for children

Adoption permanency planning

The responsibility for determining and achieving a child's care plan lies with the individual partner boroughs. There are regular permanency planning and tracking meetings to ensure that plans are progressing in a timely and appropriate way for children to achieve permanence. Referrals are made to ALS when the plan is likely to be adoption. Each borough has a named Family Finder from ALS and they work closely to begin to consider family finding work at the most appropriate time, usually when a Best Interests Decision is made for the child by the Agency Decision Maker for the borough.

Many referrals may have a different outcome following the court processes but in order to work in a timely and proactive way, a significant

level of work is undertaken by the Family Finder to prevent delay for children in the event that the plan is for adoption.

Since the inception of ALS, 37% of the 1005 referrals that we have made have resulted in a match up until the end of 2022/23. There have been a high number of change of care plans and revocations of placement orders (43%) and the other referrals have had different outcomes as their plans have progressed which relates either to the care planning or court process outcomes.

Children with a plan for adoption

After a reduction in the number of Agency Decision Maker Best Interests Decisions (BIDs) in 2020/21 we have seen figures increase, moving

Family finding referrals into ALS

Borough	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Croydon	6	40	20	30
Greenwich	0	0	0	28
Kingston	3	5	2	5
Lambeth	1	22	52	25
Lewisham	4	23	22	25
Merton	5	14	5	8
Richmond	0	7	1	6
Southwark	1	16	33	17
Sutton	4	24	8	20
Wandsworth	2	29	22	8
Total	26	180	165	172

closer to levels at the start of the RAA. There was a reduction in placement orders in 2020/21 but we have seen this figure start to improve in 2021/22.

93% of the children with BID's are under 5 at the time of coming into care. This is significant as adoptions are more likely to take place with children under the age of 5.

There has been an improvement over the last year around the numbers of placement orders that have been made following a national decline during the 2020/2021. The numbers of PO's are continuing to grow but there are still some delays in the court processes which mean that the rates of the PO's being granted is not commensurate with the Agency Decision Maker BID's.

Best Interests Decisions

Borough	Total ADM Best Interests Decisions				Number of children taken into care before turning 5 with a Best Interests Decision			
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Croydon	29	12	18	13	25	8	18	12
Greenwich	0	2	10	8	0	2	5	8
Kingston	3	4	1	3	2	3	1	3
Lambeth	9	5	9	19	8	4	8	18
Lewisham	17	17	13	15	14	11	13	15
Merton	5	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Richmond	6	8	1	1	6	8	1	1
Southwark	9	12	14	6	7	12	14	6
Sutton	14	13	6	14	13	12	6	14
Wandsworth	6	4	11	8	1	3	11	8
Total	98	80	86	90	79	66	80	88

Placements and Placement Orders

Borough	Total adoptive placements				Total Placement Orders			
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Croydon	14	19	10	9	28	11	14	15
Greenwich	0	0	5	6	0	0	8	7
Kingston	3	3	2	1	3	4	0	1
Lambeth	4	5	7	5	9	4	3	15
Lewisham	17	10	8	11	19	10	10	9
Merton	2	3	4	0	2	3	2	3
Richmond	1	5	2	1	3	5	4	0
Southwark	2	10	8	13	9	9	13	8
Sutton	8	11	6	10	6	12	10	12
Wandsworth	4	0	4	10	6	3	7	6
Total	55	66	56	66	85	61	71	76

Placing children with adoptive parents

Family finding

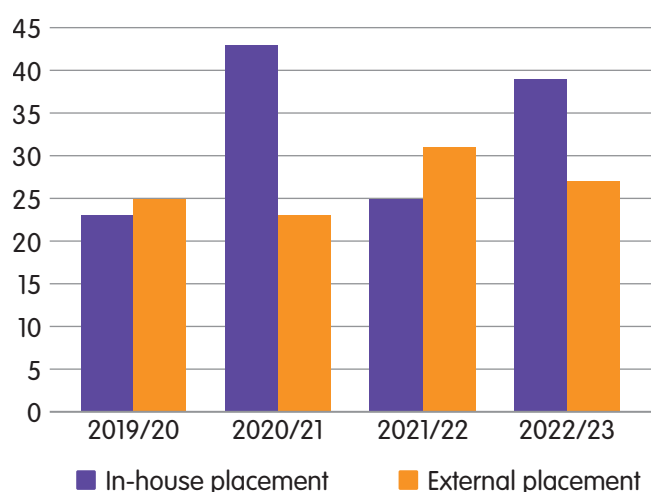
Regular family finding review meetings are held between the family finder and the borough social work team after a Placement Order is granted to monitor and progress family finding decisions.

Across ALS, there are robust connections between the Recruitment & Assessment service and the Family Finding service. Regular weekly meetings afford opportunities for exploring potential homes for children who have; or are likely to have a Placement Order and we can make great strides in establishing potential in-house adoptive family links if they are available.

Within the Adopt London matching project we are exploring ways to build stronger and quicker family finding links between the four RAAs – this



Type of adoptive placement for children matched



includes regular networking meetings where practitioners can share profiles of children and adopters, Adopt London play sessions where prospective adopters can informally meet and play alongside children and their foster carers, and enhanced Adopt London profile booklets to ensure information about potential Adopt London adopters is readily available to family finders.

In-house placements

ALS prioritise trying to place as many children as possible with our own approved adopters as far as practical and possible. The benefits of making in-house placements include having confidence in the quality of the preparation, assessment and training of adopters that is geared specifically to be relevant to the children who are waiting in ALS.

Having trained, prepared and supported our adopter's means that we have good insight into the strength and vulnerabilities of our adopters and can respond to these in a proactive way. This

can be harder to understand with adopters that we have not prepared.

Additionally, there is a clear escalation process with in-house adopters and a good knowledge of all the support that is available to them to support families in the early stages of adoptive placements.

These factors reduce the risk of placement disruptions and increase placement stability and ultimately, it also serves to keep London children connected to London and that part of their identity.

Location of placements

ALS work to place as many children within London or the South East as far as is possible. Placing children locally means that children can retain a sense of regional identity and can maintain links with their birth family more easily if this is a part of their plan. The additional benefit to local placements is that it also allows for swift and timely support where needed post placement and after the adoption order is granted.

We are committed first and foremost to ensuring children find the best homes for them as quickly as possible and would not create delay in order to place more locally but we recognise that a key factor in successful adoptions does include local placements with easy access to well understood support options.

Children waiting for an adoptive family

The family finding team and children's social work team in the borough meet regularly for Family Finding review meetings for each child to closely monitor progress, provide updates, and to ensure the plan for adoption remains right for the child. ALS are also invited to attend tracking meetings in the borough to provide information for senior managers who are monitoring permanency planning. ALS and borough senior managers speak regularly to escalate delays or concerns with a view to seeking a swift and positive resolution for children.

Early Permanence placements

There have been **22 EP placements in 2022/23 including 2 sibling groups of 2**. This has been a significant increase on the 9 EP placements that we had in the preceding year which is evidence of the strengthening of the Early Permanence practice across the partnership and through the Early Permanence Project. All adopters now going through the process are encouraged actively encouraged to attend the Early Permanence preparation training and we follow an opt-out model. This has enabled prospective adopters to make an informed decision about whether or not Early Permanence is something that they can offer or not and this approach has improved the number of EP carers that are available in ALS.

Children with a Placement Order active family finding was taking place at 31st March

Borough	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Croydon	22	5	6	10
Greenwich	0	0	3	4
Kingston	2	3	0	0
Lambeth	5	4	1	10
Lewisham	16	6	6	7
Merton	1	1	0	3
Richmond	3	1	4	0
Southwark	8	2	9	3
Sutton	4	5	8	6
Wandsworth	5	3	5	2
Total	66	30	42	45

Providing support to adoptive families and others

Support to families and adopted adults

The Adoption Support Team provide a range of services to meet the identified support needs of adopted families and adult adoptees living within the 10 boroughs. They are also responsible for coordinating the contact between all adopted children across our 10 boroughs and their birth families until the age of 18 and in some instances where appropriate, beyond this age too.

Support is accessed through the Adoption Support Helpline who are able to provide first line support in the form of Information, Advice and Guidance, onward referrals to services as appropriate and other very short focused support activities including applications to the ASF for ongoing support or access to specialist training and support such as therapeutic parenting programmes.

For our families who require more in-depth support, families are allocated to a social worker for a time-limited intervention which includes the completion of an Assessment of Need. The presenting challenges within this cohort are often complex and multi-layered and the social work intervention focuses on the provision of 1:1 therapeutic approaches and coordination of a professional network as many of the families that require this service are at risk of breakdown as a result of the presenting challenges.

Demand has remained high for adoption support services over the years. Many families are being



impacted by the pressures faced within the health sector and specifically, service provision from CAMHS or other specialist mental health support. Education is also a key area of concern for many families and this is often the reason for the contact with the adoption support services.

The key focus of this part of the service is to deliver an adoption-informed approach to support underpinned by therapeutic understanding of the needs of adoptive families and our families have valued the expertise within the team.

This year, there has been an increase in waiting times for people contacting adoption support and a key area of focus will be on reimagining the service to enable it to be more agile and responsive to families that contact us to deliver a timely intervention.

In addition, we plan to introduce a snapshot audit monitoring system to understand the level

and types of adoption support casework in the service and this has provided us with greater insights into the types of need that are most prevalent. This system has been in place in one area of Adopt London and will be piloted by the three remaining Adopt London RAA's including Adopt London South with the intention of developing a common dataset that we can use to consider adoption support demand across the partnership and to identify individual key themes to allow for targeted provision of adoption support.

Adoptive parent peer support

2022/23 has been our third year working in formal partnership with We Are Family, a London adoptive parent peer support charity who started as a single group 10 years ago. We Are Family are adopter-led and provide a wide range of peer support to adoptive parents free-of-charge. Their overall membership has now grown to 1157 members, an increase from just over 1000 at the end of 2021/22. Through We Are Family our adoptive parents are connected to social networks of other adoptive parents from the earliest stages of adoption, providing parents with a place to seek advice, normalise parenting challenges, and reduce the potential for isolation.

There are currently seven locality-based We Are Family groups running across London, as well as a group for single adoptive parents and for prospective adopters still being assessed. The groups hold meetings both virtually and in-person, organise family gatherings, and



have annual celebration picnics. We Are Family also run a playgroup for adoptive parents with pre-school children and have recently begun to initiate some common interests groups – such as for parents of teenagers.

We Are Family groups are run by adoptive parent volunteers, supported by a small staff team. In 2022/23 We Are Family have started providing professional peer support training to their volunteers which assists with the sustainability and development of their voluntary roles.



“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”

We Are Family adoptive parent and volunteer



“I was lucky that I found We Are Family early into our placement, my husband & I were struggling a great deal with the challenges with no family or support close by and being part of We Are Family changed that. I don't believe we would have the relationship with our children that we have now if it were not for the help, support and understanding that other WAF members gave to me.”

We Are Family member and adoptive parent

Adoptive parent training

We provide expert webinars to our adoptive parents twice per month through our partnership with We Are Family. Adoptive parents can choose whether to attend webinars live and have the opportunity to ask questions, or whether to watch on demand in the member hub for up to a year after the event. This way of offering learning, development, and support has been popular

with adoptive parents who need flexibility to manage childcare demands. In 2022/23 we provided 23 expert webinars on a wide variety of topics. Over 400 adoptive parents attended webinars live this year, and since the programme started over 3100 webinars have been watched on demand.

- Child to parent violence
- Executive functioning
- Self-care for parents
- Adoption support available through Adopt London
- Special Educational Needs
- Supporting contact with birth families
- Non-violent resistance parenting strategies
- Adoptee experiences
- Life story work
- Birth parent experiences
- Sensory processing
- Childhood anxiety
- Parenting teenagers



“Fantastic. So knowledgeable. I know more from Eleanor’s webinar than I’ve known for the entire year this has gone on for.”

Webinar on Special Educational Needs

“Great presenter, very engaging, experienced with specific tangible techniques.”

Webinar on non-violent resistance parenting strategies

“Brilliant, insightful and helpful”

Webinar on life story work

“It all confirms my gut feeling about contact being so important going forward.”

Webinar on supporting contact with birth families

“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.”

Webinar on therapeutic parenting

“I found it tremendously valuable and interesting, thank you!”

Webinar on childhood anxiety



The Adoptables Group for children aged 8-18

This group has been delivered through ALS since the RAA began. It is a group that meets up monthly (every other month in person) and provides a space where all the children have their adoption experience in common.

This space allows children to be without needing to explain their circumstances and to talk about things that they may not be able to share so freely with other peer groups, such as their experience of managing their identity or their birth family contact.

The sessions offer games and activities and some parents have commented that it is the only group that their child has been allowed to stay in as they often become dysregulated in other group settings.

The Adoptables have given their input into resource development to ensure that the Children's voice helps to shape our service delivery.



"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."

"I love the Adoptables."

"It's fine to be shy. There are many adults to comfort you and the Adoptables are the best to talk to."

"I'm so happy that I found this group."



Adult adoptee peer support groups

ALS have developed the support offer for adult adoptees. A group is co-facilitated by experienced ALS workers in partnership with PAC-UK. It runs monthly to provide a space for adult adoptees to share their personal experiences of their adoption journey in a safe nurturing environment where people understand their experiences and can listen without judgement. Future plans for development of this group include the group being led and facilitated by an adoptee with the support of professionals for the coordination and support of the group.

In Spring 2022, Adopt London started a new adoptee group specifically for trans-racially adopted adults in partnership with TAAN (Transracial Adult Adoptee Network).

Working in partnership with adoptees, Adopt London plan to initiate new groups in different locations in London and on different days / times of the week so that all adult adoptees in London have a group that is accessible for them to attend.



Specialist counselling support for adult adoptees and birth family members

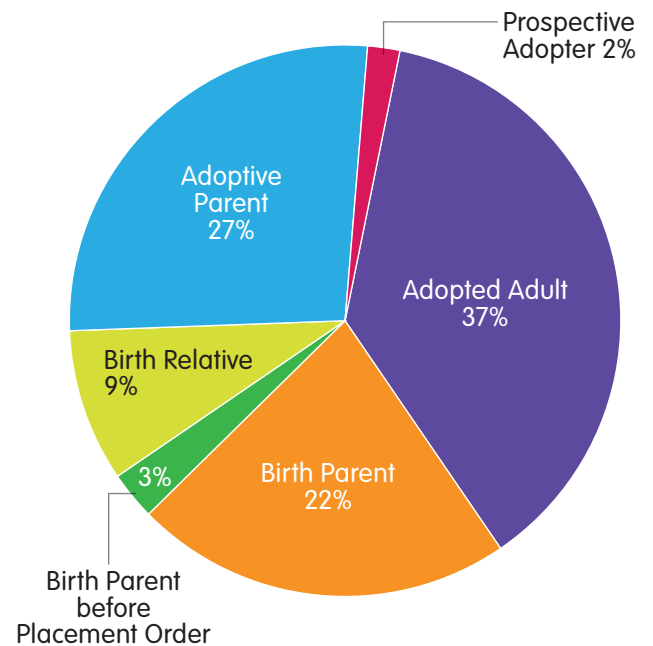
ALS have a long-standing contract with **PAC-UK**, a specialist adoption and permanency support agency, to provide an advice line and independent counselling on our behalf. This contract has been used to provide counselling services to adoptive parents, adult adoptees, and birth family members impacted by adoption. Due to a high level of demand which had created waiting times for support and an increase in requests for support from adult adoptees, management of the contract was reviewed for 2022/23 and a decision taken to prioritise use

of the contract for adult adoptees and birth family members as these groups often have no other form of counselling support available. In many cases alternative forms of support can be provided to adoptive parents following an assessment of need. Where this isn't possible there is still the provision available through the PAC-UK contract if necessary. The contract is also used by ALS for prospective adopters to access some counselling during assessment, usually to focus on a particular issue which has become a barrier or cause for concern. On some exceptional occasions, it is also necessary to provide support to birth relatives other than birth parents. The changes have been updated to ensure adult adoptees and birth family members

support needs can be met within the contract limits. The contract currently offers 6 sessions of counselling to an individual, although where there is a high level of need and a good use of counselling this offer may be reviewed and extended. Many clients find the counselling sessions supportive and helpful, although some feel that the limited number of sessions is not adequate to meet their need. Effective use of the contract is reviewed quarterly by ALS and PAC-UK.

PAC-UK also runs two birth parent support groups, one virtually and one in person. Birth parents who access support from PAC-UK advice line or counselling service are invited to join one of the groups and this can become a more sustainable form of support for individuals.

Clients referred to the PAC-UK counselling contract in 2022/23



“Deborah (PAC-UK) was very empathetic and patient. She listened attentively and gave me some advice on things to reflect on before making contact with my birth family members.”

“The PAC-UK advisor put me at ease as an expert in adoption matters, and therefore, understanding. Consequently, I felt able to open up about my issues. Besides being reassuring, the advisor also sent helpful follow-up information by email.”

“PAC-UK were really helpful. I have been calling so many numbers and this was the most helpful company I had spoken too in my journey of finding advice about my adoption. So, thank you so very much PAC-UK. I am one step closer to my personal closure and trauma.”

“From the initial contact call and throughout the subsequent therapy sessions my needs were responded to with the utmost sensitivity.”

“The response was prompt, thorough and friendly.”

“I truly think that PAC-UK deserves more credit and recognition for the wonderful work they do. After my life turned upside down, PAC-UK were there with me and provided me with a safe space. I now look forward to the future more than ever.”

“Friendly and helpful service, delivered in a confidential manner. Exemplary. Thank you.”

“I had 6 sessions during a busy period of my life, so I didn’t have a lot of time to process and missed a few sessions, but I appreciated the help and it WAS GREAT TO have a therapist who was an adopted person.”

“I feel like this service has had a positive impact on myself and my partner overall. We have been more positive since using the service and knowledgeable.”

Recommendations

Review of 2021/22 recommendations

KEY PRIORITY 1: Improve the outcomes for South London children of Black heritage, working with the Adopt London Black Adoption project to address the race disparity affecting South London children and families.

Success Measures/Actions Required:

- Maintain progress in reducing the number of days longer Black children wait compared to white children
- Increase the number of approved families suitable for Black children

Update:

- Work is still underway to work towards improving outcomes for black children in a timely way.
- Recruitment messages focus clearly on the need for black families to come forward for adoption. 29% of all approved adopters were from a black or black mixed household. Recommendations from the Black Adoption Project will be implemented to develop sustainable services to focus on outcomes.

KEY PRIORITY 2: Achieve a consistent approach to Early Permanence across the Adopt London Partnership so that South London children benefit from the London wide Early Permanence project. Children have the best chance of achieving permanency at the earliest opportunity with the least possible disruptions.

Success Measures/Actions Required:

- Increased number and ratio of Early Permanence placements across South London, preferably with ALS adopters.

Update:

- There has been an increase in the number of children benefitting from Early Permanence arrangements. We have seen the number rise over the past year from 9 to 22 children.

KEY PRIORITY 3: Improve the experience of children and families using the Letterbox service and develop new approaches to lifelong contact in adoption.

Success Measures/Actions Required:

- Letterbox arranged within each child's plan and families are prepared and supported for lifelong direct contact from the start of the adoption journey.
- Digital approaches are implemented within ALS to improve efficiency.

Update:

- 100% of support plans include a plan for ongoing contact. Advice is given through consultation with the Letterbox Team around suitability of contact plans. Adopters are being prepared for increase in contact arrangements.
 - National Team (soon to be called Adoption England) are still piloting digital arrangements with view to rolling out by September 2023 along with options of service providers to streamline contact arrangements and make it easier for children to be in touch with their birth family.
-

KEY PRIORITY 4: Ensure a smooth transition for Greenwich service users who have joined ALS.

Success Measures/Actions Required:

- Ensure Greenwich service users experience continuity of service.
 - Ensure Greenwich service users benefit from the range of services available in ALS.
-

Update:

- Greenwich have successfully joined ALS. The service users have a good understanding of the change and have been well supported in this. Transitional plans have been put in place to ensure seamless services as far as possible.
 - Greenwich-based service users are able to make enquiries about adoption, participate in family finding activity and receive support from the Adoption Support Team without any barriers.
-

KEY PRIORITY 5: Continue to improve services for adopted adults, with new ways of working.

Success Measures/Actions Required:

- Reduced waiting times for accessing the adoption file.
 - More Independent social workers recruited so that less people waiting for information from their files.
 - Wider choice of services to help support adoptees.
-

Update:

- Adopted adults are now being seen in a quicker timescale.
 - We have a consistent number of ISW's to support the work being delivered to Adopted Adults so that people can access their information in a timely way but there has also been some challenge in recruiting and retaining ISW's for a range of reasons. This continues to be a priority for ALS.
 - Adopted Adults are able to receive support through our commissioned services but can also access support through the support groups that are being run by ALS and the specialist support group TAAN which is available London-wide for transracially adopted adults.
-

KEY PRIORITY 6: Undertake an organisational stocktake to address capacity pressures to ensure the best use of resources.

Success Measures/Actions Required:

- Review of existing model against demand pressures and produce recommendations to redirect resources where most needed, such as to address the high demand for post adoption and adopted adult services.
 - Options to be developed to improve strategic commissioning capacity.
 - The Board to be provided with options to ensure the service is fit for purpose, as efficient as possible and in the strongest position moving forward.
-

Update:

- Organisational stocktake has been concluded and recommendations have been made to the Board about plans for structure with a view to revisiting these in June 2024 following a range of service reshaping activities to ensure maximum service efficiency within existing resource base.
-

KEY PRIORITY 7: Continue to develop Adopt London services for the benefit of London children, making best use of national funding and commissioning of new approaches to helping birth parents across 24 Adopt London Local Authorities.

Update:

- Adopt London South currently benefits from National funding supporting 2 projects focusing on Early Permanence and Matching to improve outcomes for children.
-

Recommendations for 2023/24

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

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

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.
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.

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

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

Maintaining Family Links

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

Working as part of Adopt London

15. Strengthen arrangements through a legal partnership agreement for 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.

Partnership Working

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

Workforce development

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



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