

# **ADOPTION IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY**

## **LAMBETH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**2015 - 2017**

### **1. Introduction**

This strategy sets out how London Borough of Lambeth and its partners will employ measures to improve timescales for Children in Care have a plan of adoption. These measures will include improvements in the quality of assessment and decision making, the quality of report writing, recruitment and assessment of adopters, family finding and matching initiatives and preparation for children.

London Borough of Lambeth is committed to providing a high standard of care to all Looked After Children, striving for timely permanence for those unable to return to their birth families.

### **2. Background**

The Looked After Children population in the London Borough of Lambeth has reduced over the past 12 months from 529 children in April 2014 to 480 in March 2015. This is contrary to the national picture where numbers have steadily increased over the past 5 years. Reductions in Looked After Children numbers in Lambeth can be attributed to improved data collection, increase in numbers of children leaving care as a result of Special Guardianship Orders and a reduction in the issue of care proceedings. Despite the decrease in Children Looked After, Lambeth continues to have a higher rate of children in care per 10,000 children under 18 than the England average (83?).

### **3. Context**

The Ofsted inspection of the Adoption Service in March 2012 judged the service as outstanding.

However, adoption scorecard published later the same year identified that children wait much longer in Lambeth to be adopted and that only a small percentage of children (7%) left care as a result of adoption as compared to the England national average of 12%. This percentage had not improved in 2014 when the new scorecards was published, although the England average for children leaving care as a result of adoption had increased to 14%.

A diagnostic report undertaken by Coram in March 2014 concluded that a breakdown of the different stages within the adoption journey for children placed for adoption showed that average timescales were longer than national benchmarks. Some children placed for adoption experienced extreme delay in their journey to permanence.

Coram has been working with the London Borough of Lambeth since 2012 in an attempt to improve permanence in relation to timescales for both children and adoptees. Following the adoption diagnostic in March 2014, an action plan was developed as a means of further improved performance.

Ofsted inspection of March 2015, Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, Children Looked After and achieving permanence and Adoption were also inadequate. Inspectors report that:

- Too many children in Lambeth wait too long to be adopted.
- Children are not considered for adoption at an early enough stage in Lambeth.
- The quality of data available continues to hamper the understanding and development of the service.
- There is a significant underrepresentation of children from minority ethnic groups leaving care in Lambeth in comparison with the local population.
- Timescales of the recruitment process remains poor.
- Life history work is not routinely being undertaken in a timely and effective way.

#### **4. Vision for Children**

We believe that every child deserves the right to grow up in a nurturing and loving family who will support them through childhood and prepare them for life.

Within that we want people to make an extraordinary difference.

We aim to recruit at least 30 adopters within 2015/16 in order to offer a range of placement opportunities to those children with a plan of adoption.

We also intend to establish fostering to adopt opportunities for in order to minimise placement moves for children and thereby improve their attachment experience.

#### **5. How we will improve the experience of the child's adoption journey.**

##### **Children waiting too long**

Children on average in Lambeth waited 1001 days to be placed with an adoptive family in 2013/14. This compared with the England average of 547 days and placed Lambeth 149<sup>th</sup> in the England ranking.

It is proposed that a number of initiatives will assist in creating a more robust process, reducing drift and ensuring timelier decision making.

These initiatives will include:

- Up-skilling of all staff across Social Care Services – (much of the delay attributed to children's cases occurs outside of the Adoption Service).
- Strengthening the tracking process of all children who may have a plan of adoption.
- Introducing and embedding the concept of parallel planning and early family finding.
- Ensuring children's records on Framework contain all relevant information to enable reliable performance reporting.

The objective is to bring performance in Lambeth, in relation to timescales, more in line with England averages.

## **6. Quality of Data**

Data relating to children's plans has not been readily available and has therefore impacted on the Council's ability to adequately forecast, plan and intervene in relation to challenges in the child's journey.

Work is underway to ensure workers understand the importance of their recording and that what is recorded can then be easily accessed to enable performance reporting.

## **7. Recruitment of Ethnic Minority Adopters**

Work is underway to recruit adequate adopters matching the ethnicity of our children waiting to be adopted.

There are currently 8 children undergoing active family finding whose ethnicity spans white/Portuguese, Asian/British and Black/Caribbean. There are currently 9 sets of Lambeth adopters waiting to be matched who are all White British. Early Family finding is also underway for 10 additional children.

Collaborative arrangements with Southwark, Croydon and Wandsworth will be strengthened in an attempt to target carers reflective of the racial and cultural needs of our children.

## **8. Timeliness of Recruitment of Adopters.**

Work undertaken by Coram during 2014 established a tool which tracked the adopter's journey through the process of their approval.

New regulations in respect of adoption assessments published in April 2013 require adopters to be approved within a 6 month timescale by the agency.

During the Ofsted inspection, only one prospective adopter had completed the process within the new timescale.

Regular performance meetings will continue to identify challenges and ensure timeliness of assessments wherever possible.

## **9. Quality of Report Writing**

Reports were judged by Ofsted during their recent inspection to be of a variable quality.

Advice surgeries, workshops and mentoring are all strategies to be implemented in an effort to ensure all Social Workers understand and are competent in the delivery of high quality reports.

## ADOPTION IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2015 - 2017

Issue	Objective	Activity	Lead	Timescale	Target	RAG
<b>Children Waiting too Long</b>	1 - Permanence Plans for Children are progressed in a timely manner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Root and branch review of data.</li> </ul>	JL/SS	31/05/2015	All children entering care appear on adoption tracker	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Revocation of POs where change of plan.</li> </ul>	JF/HF/FS	30/09/2015	% of children for whom plan of adoption has changed remains consistent with the England average 13% (20 children by 30/09/2015)	
<b>Children Waiting too long</b>	2- Children are adopted more quickly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monthly Adoption tracker to identify drift and remove barriers to progress.</li> </ul>	JL/FS	30/09/2015	Increase in the numbers of children leaving care through adoption from 7% to 12%	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop Family Finding policy and associated training.</li> </ul>	LH/JL	31/09/2016	Reduction in average no of days between a child becoming looked after and placed with adopters from 694 to 426. With a midway target of 540 by April 2016	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular reporting to SMT/CPB</li> </ul>		30/06/2016	Increase in the percentage of children who wait less than 16 months between BLA and moving in with their adoptive family from 30% to 50%	

				March 2017	Reduce average timescale for children adopted between placement order and match to an adoptive family from 430 days to 121 by March 2017. Mid point improvement to 280 by September 2016.	
	3- Life Story Work for Children Looked After is established and embedded with workers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop post of Life Story Champion to drive improvements/expertise in this area.</li> <li>Develop resource library of tools for staff and ensure they are utilized.</li> <li>Thematic Audit of Life Story Work evident on files</li> </ul>	JL/BT	31/10/2015	Life story champion to be appointed in post.	
			JL/CWE	31/03/2016	85% of workforce trained in the use of adoption and permanence toolkits. 100% of children with permanence plans have life story work completed.	
			SL/SC/BS	31/03/2016	80% of life story work is judged as good following thematic audit	

Issue	Objective	Activity	Lead	Timescale	Targets	RAG
	4- Staff understand and are proactive in planning for permanence for children looked after	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relaunch permanence policy</li> <li>• Secure training from BAAF to assist workers in their knowledge around permanency/child development.</li> <li>• Awayday to include legal representatives to ensure compliance with regulation/legislation</li> <li>• Develop &amp; embed parallel planning processes.</li> <li>• Legal undertake thematic audit of court feedback to establish baseline position</li> </ul>	<p>JL</p> <p>JL/LH</p> <p>JL/FS</p> <p>NL/WFD</p> <p>FS</p>	<p>31/05/2015</p> <p>31/07/2015</p> <p>31/10/2015</p> <p>31/03/2016</p>	<p>% of children with permanence plan at 2nd review increases to 100%.</p> <p>85% of staff attending training report increased understanding of permanence and attachment.</p> <p>75% of staff to have attended briefings</p> <p>80% of workforce to have completed training in attachment and permanence</p> <p>25% increase in positive feedback from baseline which is established through a legal thematic audit of court orders and directions</p>	<p style="background-color: #92d050;"> </p> <p style="background-color: #e67e22;"> </p>
<b>Quality of data</b>	5- Data available enables staff/managers to plan effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop performance digest to incorporate adoption data.</li> </ul>	JL/LB	31/07/2015	Analysis of data demonstrates future impact on social care and outcomes for children.	<p style="background-color: #92d050;"> </p>

Issues	Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Activity</li> </ul>	Lead	Timescale	Targets	RAG
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish performance challenge sessions with staff</li> </ul>	JL	01/05/2015	All managers attend and understand their contribution.	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adapt Framework to ensure appropriate data is able to be captured.</li> <li>Improve ADM timescales</li> </ul>	JL/QA Team	30/09/2015	Date of ADM and panel match available on FW reports. 100% of all ADM panel matches made within 10 working days.	
<b>Recruitment of carers</b>	<p>6- Increase the numbers of carers recruited to include those from minority ethnic groups as reflected in the CLA cohort</p> <p>Identify targeted recruitment campaign for carers for the</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analysis of data in relation to children waiting and adopters waiting.</li> <li>Targeted recruitment campaign to include Home for Good project.</li> </ul>	JL/CWE	31/03/2016	<p>Recruit 50% more adopter for adoptive placements by 31/03/2016</p> <p>Increase the percentage of BME children leaving care through adoption from 6% to 12%.</p>	

	cohort of children who wait.					
<b>Issues</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Timescale</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>RAG</b>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Embed tracking tool to chart adopters journey</li> </ul>	JL/CWE	31/03/2016	85 % of carers approved within timescale	
<b>Quality of Report Writing</b>	7- Improves quality of prospective adopter reports & child permanence reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workshops &amp; advice surgeries for staff.</li> <li>Embed quality assurance process</li> <li>Ensure feedback from panels disseminated to teams</li> <li>Thematic audit in relation to CPRs and PARs</li> </ul>	CWE/HF  BB/CC  BB/CC  SC/BS	31/03/2016  31/10/2015  30/09/2015  31/12/2015	Thematic Audit establishes consistent quality/standards  80% of reports from audit judged good.	