



Annual Report on Adoption Activity

Coram Ambitious for Adoption

2020-2021

Mission Statements:

Bromley Council's Adoption Service believes that every child has the right to a permanent, secure and loving family which embraces their individual needs and differences, including their culture and identity where this is possible.

Coram's mission is to develop, deliver and promote best practice in the support of vulnerable children and young people. Our vision is that every child has the best possible chance to lead a fulfilling life.



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1. Introduction

This report provides an overview of the activity of Bromley Adoption Service from 1st April 2020 to end of March 2021. The main purpose of this document is to report on the work undertaken by Bromley Adoption Service, update on the new developments and set out the ambitions and plans for the future.

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 puts the responsibility on all local authorities to establish and maintain an adoption service in their area, to meet the needs in relation to adoption, of children who have or may be adopted, of adults who have been adopted, and persons who have or may adopt a child. Since June 2019, Bromley Council have delegated most of those functions to Coram Ambitious for Adoption, a Regional Adoption Agency. Bromley retains overall responsibility for their own Children in Care but delegating most adoption functions to Coram Ambitious for Adoption.

The regionalisation reforms as set out in Regionalising Adoption paper (2015) intended to reduce the large number of agencies providing adoption services by creating 25-30 regional agencies. The expectation was that larger organisations should be able to pool resources and share best practice resulting in: targeted and efficient recruitment of adopters; speedier matching with a larger more diverse pool of adopters; and an improved range of adoption support services.

The purpose of this partnership is to help to simplify and speed up the adoption process in Bromley. Coram Ambitious for Adoption is a partnership between Coram, the UK's oldest children's charity, and several local authorities in London, bringing together their expertise to match children more quickly with their new adoptive families.

Coram Ambitious for Adoption is the first port of call for adoption enquiries on behalf of Bromley Council and provides access to adoption support for all of its adoptive families. Coram is judged Outstanding by Ofsted and has more than 40 years' experience in finding vulnerable children permanent loving families.

In addition to Bromley Council, Coram Ambitious for Adoption also provides adoption services for Hillingdon, Waltham Forest, Harrow, Redbridge, Bi-Borough The City of London and Slough.



The services provided through the Regional Adoption Agency include the recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters and the management of adoption panels, which take place in the 'hub' at Coram main office in Brunswick Square, and the family finding for children, and adoption and post adoption support are provided by Coram staff in the 'spokes' situated in each of the local authorities.

Adoption concerns only a small proportion of Bromley children who are unable to safely return to their families, but they are some of the most vulnerable children in society. Adoption usually offers the benefits of family life throughout childhood and beyond into adulthood. It provides the opportunity for secure relationships to develop and the chance of developmental recovery for adopted children; the majority of whom have been maltreated and/or suffered significant trauma (Selwyn. et al., 20158).

There were **10** looked after children placed for adoption in the year 2020/2021, and **10** adoption orders made.

Coram Ambitious for Adoption is responsible for recruitment, assessment, approval and support of adopter's pre and post-order, family finding for looked after children with an adoption plan and post-adoption support services. The team provides a duty service for adopters and offers consultancy on adoption matters to social workers from the Referral & Assessment, Safeguarding, Children in Care and Court Teams. The team also provides post placement and post adoption support and a range of services for adopted adults and descendants. The function of assessment of intercountry adoption applicants is subcontracted to the Intercountry Adoption Centre.

2. Early Permanence

Early permanence provides an evidence-based approach to securing permanence that ensures that children who cannot live with their families are placed with prospective long-term carers at the earliest opportunity. Early permanence enables a child in care to be placed with foster carers who are ready and willing to adopt them later, if the Court decides they cannot live with their birth family. It is intended to reduce the time that a child spends in care and minimise the disruption of repeated moves to different families. This aims to enable children to experience a loving and secure home in which they feel safe and settled as quickly as possible. Early permanence placements can limit delay and secure good outcomes for children whether they are rehabilitated home, or they are adopted.

Early permanence for children has continued to be the focus and a viable option for young children in Bromley who are likely to need adoption families.

Coram family finder tracks all cases that might need EP carers and works closely with the social work team to identify the most suitable placement for the baby.

Cases needing an early permanence placement are discussed and scrutinised at different stages of the Bromley Children Service's involvement. A weekly Legal Gateway Panel provides management oversight and scrutiny of all cases where a Legal Planning Meeting has been requested by Children Social Care and to ensure effective early case planning, timely interventions, and pre-proceedings assessments. This panel is chaired by the Head of Safeguarding Service.

Another layer of scrutiny is added by the Permanence Panel. This Panel meets weekly and focuses on children and young people entering care in Bromley, analyses care plans and ensure that all aspects of care arrangements, permanency and contingency plans are in place. All children and young people coming into care are presented to the permanence panel between 6-8 weeks after accommodation. The panel is chaired by the Head of Permanence.

Coram family finder also uses the weekly performance data to monitor the progress of all the potential early permanence cases and any new referrals are discussed with the Early permanence team responsible for recruiting, assessing and approving early permanence carers in Coram Adoption and Permanent Families Service based in Central London.

Coram family finder is also part of the London Wide Early Permanence Steering group, a forum which meets bi-monthly to share expertise, ideas, good practice and family find for children who need early permanence carers.

Bromley was the first London borough to be awarded the ‘*Working towards Quality Mark*’ in Early Permanence and fostering for adoption has become an established early permanence practice in Bromley. The family finder attends all the early permanency meetings and had a crucial role in the decision made regarding the care plan. Last year, one child was placed in an early permanence placement from hospital, when she was 1 day old and one child was adopted having being placed with early permanent carers the previous financial year.

3. Children with an Adoption Plan

There were 19 children with an Agency decision for adoption in 2020/21, of which 10 were male and 9 were female. Of this cohort, there was five sibling groups of 2 children and 1 sibling group of 3 children.

The ages of this cohort of children when an adoption decision was made were as follows:

Age	Number
Under 12 months	2
1	6
2	3
3	2
4	3
5	2
6	1
7	1
Total:	20

The number of ADM adoption decisions granted had increased in the last financial year from 13 in the year 2019-2020 which was the same number as in the year 2018-19 and in 2017/18.

There was a significant change in the number of sibling groups requiring a placement together in 2020/21, comparing to previous year 2019/20 and a notable decrease in the number of children under the age of one from 8 the previous financial year to just 2 in the last year. Bromley undertakes a comprehensive Together or Apart assessment in circumstances where separation of siblings may be required to determine the best permanence option.

Of the cohort of 19 children who had adoption plans agreed in the year 2020/21,

- 2 were matched, placed and subsequently adopted within the same year 2020/21
- 1 child was matched at Adoption Panel and placed with prospective adopters
- 14 children were in different stages of the Care proceedings and either had a Placement Order and active family finding activity was taking place or awaiting Court's decision about their long-term plans. Out of these children, a sibling group of 2 were linked with prospective adopters and due to be presented to Panel in the following financial year.
- 7 of these children had Placement Orders granted.
- 3 children had the adoption decision reverted (2 went to live with birth family member so the care plan changed to rehabilitation under Supervision Order and 1 had the care plan changed to SGO).
- 1 child whose adoption plan was agreed in the year 2016/17 had the adoption decision reverted (Placement Order revoked)

4. Children Placed for Adoption in 2020/2021

Despite the global pandemic, the family finding activity for children who needed permanent families continued and children continued to be introduced to new parents and successfully placed with them after a period of introduction.

The family finding activity is carried out in the RAA by an experienced social worker with dedicated role in family finding for children with adoption plans from early stages of the child's care planning. The Family finder has an advisory role in matters such as Early Permanence planning for unborn or young babies and attends Final Care Plan Meetings where the permanency options are discussed for each child. The family finder brings her expertise and knowledge of the available resources within the Regional Adoption Agency as well as nationwide, advising about timescales and

The Family Finding Lead undertakes the family finding in house (Coram RAA) and nationally for all cases where adoption is the plan, or likely to be the plan/ early family finding, working closely with practitioners from other teams, services and partner agencies.

There were **10** Bromley looked after children placed with prospective adopters during the year, compared to 12 in 2019/20 and 9 the year before that.

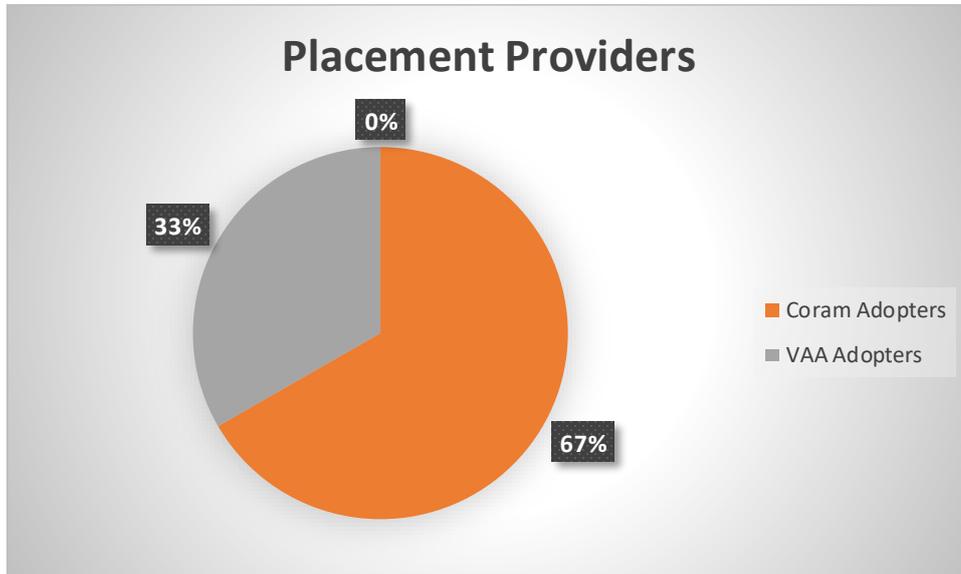
In this cohort there were 1 sibling group of 2 and 8 individual children.

In terms of gender, there were 5 male and 5 female children, with the eldest being 5-year-old and the youngest 7 months at the time of adoption placement.

In terms of ethnicity 9 children were of White British heritage and one child was White Other (Turkish and Romanian).

Of the cohort of **10** children placed for adoption, 1 had been initially been placed with her carers as an early permanence placement as a newborn baby from hospital.

In terms of placement provider, of the cohort of 10 children, 6 were placed with Coram adopters and 4 were placed with adopters from voluntary adoption agencies under inter-agency arrangements.



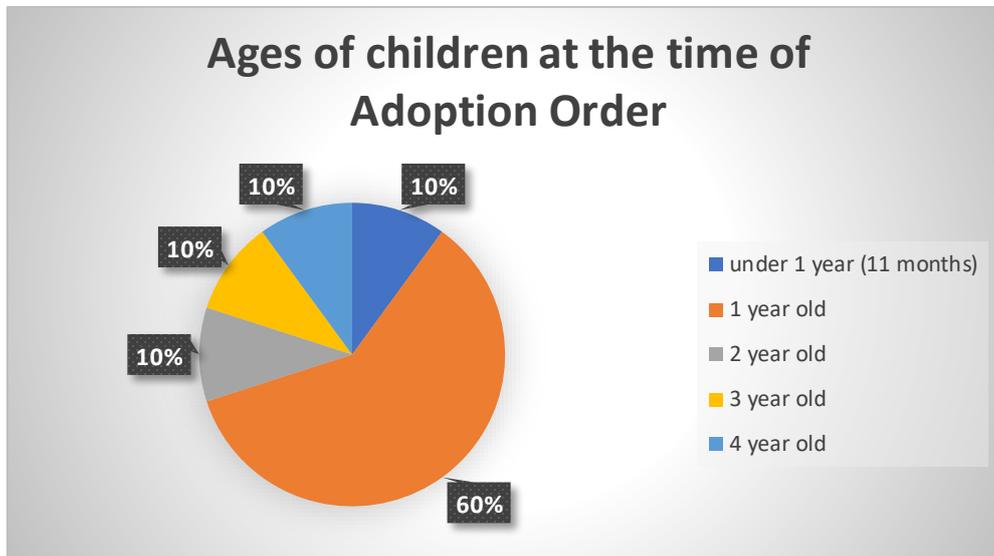
4.1. Family finding status on 31st March 2021 for the children with Placement Orders and ADM decisions waiting for adoption placement was:

- 1 sibling group of two had been linked with Coram adopters and were due to be matched in the next financial year. Their Placement Order was granted in February 2021.
- 1 sibling group of 2 had also been provisionally linked with a Coram couple who were in the last stage of their assessment process. Their Placement Order was granted in February 2021.
- Active family finding was taking place for a 2-year-old boy of Mixed heritage whose Placement Order was made in December 2020. The child has complex needs and further assessments are needed to establish the complexity of his needs.
- All the other children with an ADM decision were tracked through monthly family finding meetings and awaiting the conclusion of Care Proceedings.

5. Children Made Subject to Adoption Orders

10 children were made subject to Adoption Orders in 2020/2021.

- 1 child was under 1 year old (11 months)
- 6 children were 1 year old
- 1 child was aged 2 years old
- 1 child was aged 3 years old
- 1 child was aged 4 years old



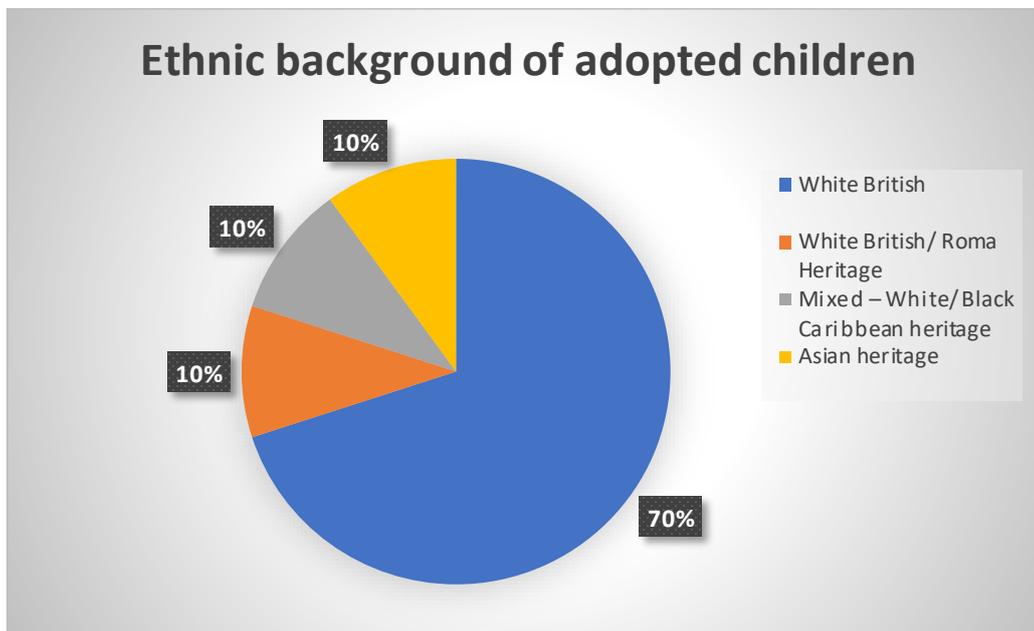
Out of the 10 children, the eldest child was aged 48 months (4 years old) at the time the Adoption order was granted, and the youngest child was aged 11 months.

Of the 10 children cohort:

- All children were placed in separate adoptive placements
- 9 children were placed in new adoptive families
- 1 child was placed in a family who adopted previously
- 6 of the children were male and 4 were female
- 7 children had been placed for adoption within the year 2019/20

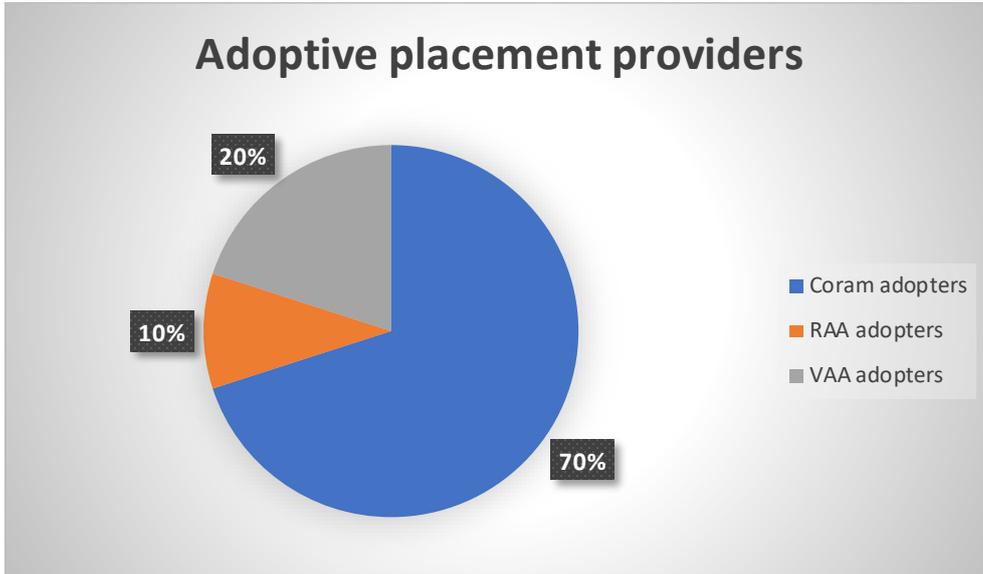
In terms of children's ethnic background, out of the 10 children:

- 7 were of White British heritage
- 1 of White British/Roma heritage
- 1 of Mixed – White/ Black Caribbean heritage
- 1 of Asian heritage



In terms of placement providers, of the 10 children adopted in the year 2020/21,

- 7 of the children were adopted by Coram adopters
- 1 was adopted by adopter from other RAA
- 2 were adopted by adopters from voluntary adoption agencies





6. Adoption scorecards

Adoption Scorecards have been published by the Department for Education on an annual basis since 2012. They measure local authorities' performance against two key indicators. The A1 indicator measures the average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family for children who have been adopted. A low number of days represents a good performance. The A2 indicator measures the average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family. A low number of days represents a good performance.

The timeliness has been improved for adoptions completed in 2020/21 and despite several government lockdowns due to the global pandemic, the children who needed adoptive families did not need to wait unnecessarily and matches and introductions took place within the government guidance.

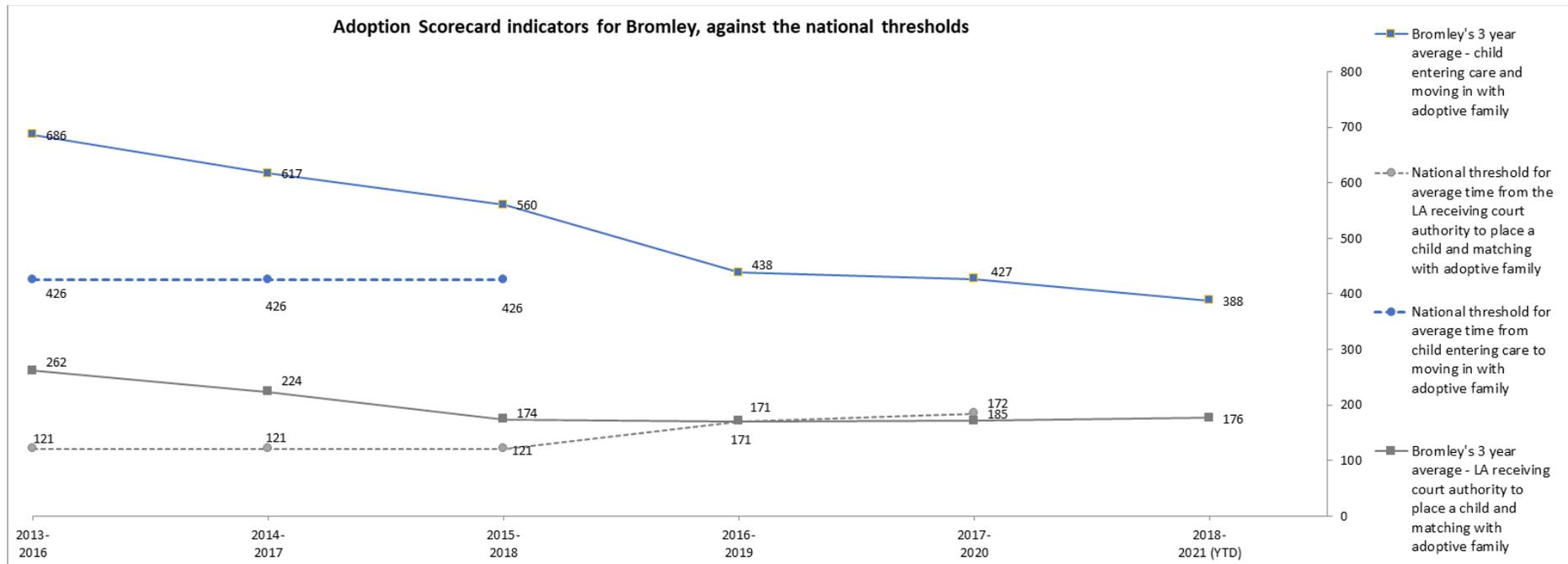
The average number of days between a child entering care and moving in with an adoptive family in 2018/21 (3 years average) was 388. This is 38 day shorter than the National target of 426 days. The average number of days between a child entering care and moving with an adoptive family in 2020/21 (single year) is 287 which means that Bromley children wait an average 139 days less to be with their new family in comparison to other UK children.

The average number of days between Bromley receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and matching the child with an adoptive family is

152 days in 2020/2021. This is 31 days longer than the National target of 121 days. The 3-year average for 2018/21 is also above this at 176 days.

The scorecards were higher this year in comparison to other years due to a combination of factors such as the delays caused by the global pandemic, adoptive placement needed for a siblings' group, and older children from black and ethnic minority background.

The three year average is also influenced by and historic case, an adoption placement that broke down in 2018 (child needed to wait 9 months until he was ready to move with another family).



7. Adoption Panel

In November 2019 the approval function of the Panel was transferred to Coram Ambitious for Adoption Regional Adoption Agency, including matching recommendations.

During 2020 -2021, 27 panels were conducted at Coram Ambitious for Adoption.

43 adopters were presented for approval and 31 matches were brought to Panel, 9 of which were for Bromley children.

7.1. Overview of the service

The Adoption and Permanency Panel for the region is constituted in accordance with legislation, regulations and guidance. The panel members, chair and vice chairs, are drawn from an approved central list of panellists. The work of the panel is supported by a Panel Adviser and Panel Administrator.

Members of the Adoption and Permanency Panel include individuals with personal experience of adoption, adopters and adopted adults and other independent members with experience of fostering and looked after children. Panels are balanced as far as possible in terms of gender, age, ethnicity and experience.

There are 3 Panel Chairs appointed that rotate to ensure timely panels in response to the needs of the service. In addition, there are 3 Panel Vice Chairs appointed to the Panel. The central list of panel members comprises of 27 members (6 from the original Coram panel and 21 new panel members).

7.2. The purpose of the Panel

The panel considers all applications from prospective adopters and foster carers (for early permanence) and makes recommendations of approval. The recommendation is made to the Agency Decision Marker for Ambitious for Adoption

The panel considers all applications for the approval of a match between a child/ren and suitable adopters. This recommendation goes to Bromley Agency Decision Maker.

The panel also considers placements for adoption where the birth parent(s) request their child be adopted. The recommendation of the match goes to Bromley ADM.

The Panel considers 'brief reports' on adoption and fostering applications during stage 2 of the assessment on whether the assessment to approve adopters should continue if the agency is considering terminating the assessment.

The Panel may consider reports on proposed or actual placements for the purpose of information and advice.

The Panel considers reports on the progress of placements from time to time and gives advice.

The Panel considers reports on disrupted placements and reports of any cases referred to the IRM and advises on lessons to be learned.

The Panel performs a quality assurance function, commenting on the standard of reports received and the quality of assessments. This may relate to a particular complex case, or the required six monthly or annual report

An annual quality report is received from the panel and submitted to senior managers and Trustees, the findings of which are incorporated in progress reporting for the regional agency.

Panel training is offered regularly to ensure child centred and informed delivery incorporating case law and panel outcomes.

The Panel can also give advice about the numbers and ages of children in relation to prospective adopters; about post adoption contact; delegated parental responsibility and adoption support plans.

The Panel makes recommendations based on written reports prepared in advance by the relevant social worker, and the social worker and/or team manager attend at Panel to discuss and clarify any matters relevant to the application. When considering the approval of prospective adopters or a match between prospective adopters and a child, prospective adoptive and adopters have the option of attending the panel in person. Applicants who decide not to attend in person are not disadvantaged in any way and no judgement is made from their decision not to do so although every effort will be made to assist their attendance.

The recommendations and advice of the Panel are referred, along with the final minutes of the meeting, to the relevant Agency Decision Maker, for a decision to be

made and conveyed to all parties within the time scales laid down in the Adoption & Children Act 2002.

8. Recruitment and Approval of Adopters

In relation to preparation training delivered to prospective adopters, Coram RAA had delivered during the year:

- 14 information events,
- 43 preparation courses at Stage 1,
- 46 preparation courses at Stage 2.

8.1 Recruitment/promotion activities

Coram Ambitious for Adoption warmly welcomes all adopters single, married or in partnerships and from all communities who are willing and able to adopt children from all backgrounds, which may include sibling groups, children with disabilities or complex needs and children with contact arrangements. The recruitment strategy is informed by the needs of the children across the RAA with a plan for adoption and the regular monitoring of data regarding those enquiring and progression as adopters. Currently, 38% of children with a plan for adoption across the RAA partnership are from a black, Asian and minority ethnic background

A sector-wide National Adopter Recruitment Strategy provides the overarching framework for the recruitment, assessment and support of adopters and is utilized to drive forward the sufficiency of adopters for the Coram Ambitious for Adoption Regional Adoption Agency.

A major campaign in October 2020 included the targeted recruitment within the black African and black Caribbean communities in London. Coram Ambitious for Adoption RAA are continuously running activities aimed at promoting adoption and attracting prospective adopters. A dedicated team continually run Google Ads, press and social media activity promoting the RAA. In addition, they run small digital campaigns around key adoption calendar events, like for example LGBT Fostering & Adoption Week including integrated marketing activity across a digital and offline channel, campaigns such as National Adoption Week.

Coram are actively involved in the delivery of the national campaign programme to raise awareness about adoption amongst the general public and specifically amongst

black, Asian and minority ethnic and faith communities, taking an inclusive approach and challenging the myths which can prevent people from thinking they can adopt. Coram fully utilize all social media channels as well as other marketing approaches, including radio and street advertising to promote these messages within our own agency.

Information Meetings have taken place online during the last financial year on a bi-monthly basis. These events are very well attended and give adopters the opportunity to ask questions to social workers from the Recruitment and Assessment team. Feedback forms are gathered at the end of the event where prospective adopters can request to be contacted about progressing further into the adoption process.

8.2. Assessment

The assessments are undertaken by the Adoption Recruitment and Assessments Teams based at the Coram office.

The teams are guided by the statutory timescales for the adoption approval process and adopters are asked to ensure that they can meet these at the start of the assessment. This is a child focused process, and adopters need to understand our commitment is to the welfare of children needing permanence through adoption.

At the heart of the Government's adoption reform programme is a shorter two-stage approval process for prospective adopters. The aim of this process is to allow potential adopters first to learn more about adoption, and then to move quickly through the approval process. Whilst remaining rigorous, the approval process is time-bound and ensures that prospective adopters have a greater role in the process. There is also a fast-track process for some previous adopters and approved foster carers. After completion of the initial pre-stage, prospective applicants who are likely to meet the needs of children needing an adoptive placement are invited to submit a 'Registration of Interest' and they begin Stage One of the adoption process. This stage is adopter led and should be completed in two months. During this period, it is a time for prospective adopters to complete DBS and medicals while statutory checks and references are taken. If all checks are satisfactory, applicants are advised that they are, or are not, able to move to Stage Two. Stage Two has required timescales of four months, applicants are engaged in the preparation training and assessment during this stage. Prospective adopters are invited to attend preparation training during this stage. The programme includes information on early life trauma, loss, attachment,

abuse, adoptive parenting 'parenting plus', post adoption contact, post adoption support and social media, etc. Due to the pandemic and restrictions imposed by the government re: face to face meetings, the sessions were delivered online via Zoom.

Once an adopter's approval by the ADM is confirmed the allocated social worker will work with the adopter to identify a child who will benefit from the skills and experience of the prospective adopters. This will include working with colleagues in Ambitious for Adoption, and also referring children to other agencies and to Link Maker.

8.3. Early Permanence carers Assessments

Coram Ambitious for Adoption offers additional preparation to early permanence carers about the nature of these placements and what would be expected of the carers, as well as opportunities to meet experienced early permanence carers to hear about their experience at first hand. It is important that carers have the opportunity to discuss the issues and to understand the legal framework and the expectations of foster carers.

Coram uses the CoramBAAF Prospective Adopter's Report (PAR) which enables them to assess the carers suitability to offer an early permanence placement at the same time as they are being assessed as prospective adopters. Some people may have decided that they wish to be approved as early permanence carers before the assessment begins. However, it may also be possible to decide this during the assessment, once they have had opportunities to learn about the implications of acting as a foster carer during the time when the case is being decided by the court.

8.4. Intercountry Adoption

The Adoption Team is responsible for providing a service to people living within the borough that wish to consider inter-country adoption. Through membership of the Inter-country Adoption Centre (IAC) additional information on inter-country adoption; preparation groups for first- and second-time adopters and training is provided.

The service is also responsible for providing support to applicants waiting for a match, which last year included children being matched and adopted from Bangladesh and India.

9. Adoption and Post Adoption Support Services

DATA:

Activity	2020-2021
Requests for assessments for post-adoption support did you receive from families	43
How many assessments resulted in the provision of support	38
How many assessments were still being carried out at 31 March 2020?	0
Number of families in receipt of pre-adoption support (not one off advice) for support that was provided	4
Total ASF (pre and post order)	72 applications
Number of families in receipt of adult adoptee adoption support (not one off advice) for support that was provided	15

9.1. Overview of the service

Statutory adoption support is a key service to the regional agency and these services operate from local authority settings and managed by Coram RAA.

Adoption support services are prescribed by Adoption Support Regulations Services 2005 and listed as:

- Financial support
- Services to enable groups of adoptive children, adoptive parents and natural parents or former guardians of an adoptive child to discuss matters relating to adoption;
- Assistance, including mediation services, in relation to arrangements for contact between an adoptive child and a natural parent, natural sibling, former guardian or a related person of the adoptive child;
- Services in relation to the therapeutic needs of an adoptive child;
- Assistance for the purpose of ensuring the continuance of the relationship between an adoptive child and his adoptive parent, including—
- Training for adoptive parents for the purpose of meeting any special needs of the child; and
- Assistance where disruption of an adoptive placement, or of an adoption arrangement following the making of an adoption order, has occurred or is in danger of occurring, including—
- Making arrangements for the provision of mediation services; and
- Organising and running meetings to discuss disruptions in such placements or arrangements.

If there is a high level of crisis, safeguarding concerns or high risk of adoption breakdown/disruption it may require a different type of intervention and a referral will be sent to MASH to access safeguarding and family support services and work together with these professionals to ensure the family have the right kind of support.

Children's presenting with emotional difficulties who are posing risk to themselves or others are referred to CAMHS and Bromley Adoption Service has a great working relationship with the LAAC Team.

The post order team also works closely with the virtual school in providing advice and support to schools, parents and individual children with regards to education matters.

There has been a long-standing tradition for Bromley Post Adoption Service to organise a yearly adoption picnic for adopters and their adopted children. This event has been a success year after year, and usually very well attended. Unfortunately, due to the global pandemic, we were not able to organise a picnic in 2020.

9.2. Adoption Support Process

9.2.1. Pre-Adoption Order

Child's allocated social worker completes the Adoption Support Plan as part of the Adoption Placement Report (APR) and the support plan is discussed with and signed by adopters and any ongoing financial support will be agreed at this stage. Decision re: financial support lays with Head of Service for Bromley Permanence Service.

Signed contact arrangements: indirect (letterbox) and direct contact will be agreed and signed by birth family and adopters pre-Adoption Order.

The life story book and later life letter will be completed by child's social worker and given to the adopters before the case can be transferred to post adoption, 10 days after the Celebration Hearing.

9.2.2. Post Adoption Order

Once the adoption order has been granted, the case will be transferred to Post Adoption Team and one of the following pathways will be followed:

- There is no need for immediate support - Case to close and adoptive parents to be informed how they can refer themselves for support.
- Case to remain open for letterbox exchange only. Adopters will be advised how they can refer themselves for support

- Case to remain open with an allocated social worker due to ongoing support plan. ongoing support plans will be reviewed at 3 or 6 monthly intervals until case closes.

We receive referrals directly from adoptive parents and professionals via phone call or email.

All cases which are open to post adoption support require an assessment of need and adoption support plan completed by the Post Adoption Team social workers, this will be then be reviewed once a year or any time the plan needs to significantly change.

Adopters are invited to regular coffee mornings and post adoption workshops organised by senior practitioners across the RAA. They take place every other month and are currently held online. The topics are relevant to the needs of the adopted children and their families and well attended.

9.3. Adoption Support Fund (ASF) Applications

The introduction and availability of the Adoption Support Fund in England has stimulated the provision of support services in an unprecedented way. Much of the focus of Bromley Post Adoption Service has been on ensuring a speedy application to the Fund to enable therapeutic services to be commissioned with minimal delay. This is usually based on a comprehensive assessment of need to ensure that services are responsibly and effectively commissioned in a joined-up and child-and-family centred way.

The therapeutic interventions offered via the Adoption Support Fund are mainly in-depth attachment /trauma models and they are often long-term interventions. The adoption support social worker works closely with other teams in Bromley Social Care, Thrive, independent therapists and CAMHS Teams to provide the relevant support to the adoptive families.

It is the responsibility of the Post Adoption Team to assess the need of the family, identify relevant services and make the application to the fund.

72 applications were made to Adoption Support Fund in 2020/21 which brought the total spend on approved services in 2020-21 to £474,722.74. The secured funding enabled us to purchase various resources for our adoptive families. This included

Family therapy, specialist assessments, sensory integration programme, therapeutic parenting courses, family mediation provisions, play therapy, creative therapy .

9.4. Work with Birth Families

It is the responsibility of local authority adoption agencies to ensure that birth families affected by adoption have access to independent advice, information and support when the plan for the child becomes adoption. This is now provided in Bromley through THRIVE, the therapeutic support team. This service has a designated worker who is a therapeutically trained social worker who offers to birth parents affected by adoption to help assist them with loss and separation. Experienced senior practitioners in the post adoption service offer advice with letter writing.

9.5. Other adoption support services offered

9.5.1. Education Support

Educational support to adopters is provided by Bromley's Head Teacher of Virtual School for Children Looked After. The Virtual Head supports adoption via consultations with adoption service to support adopters in accessing the right educational provision for Children Looked After.

Additionally, the Adoption Support Fund has been used to provide play therapy resources in schools and this has reduced the need to access Pupil Premium Plus fund being used.

9.5.2. Post Adoption Contact

The letterbox arrangements are managed as part of the post adoption support duty system.

- Number of children who have letterbox arrangements: **206**
- Number of exchanges: **304**
- Number of family members receiving letters: **554**

The letterbox coordinator provides the initial point of contact for information, advice and support to all those involved in indirect contact between adopted child and their birth families. If intensive support is required a senior practitioner in the Post Adoption Service will be allocated for further work.

There are 13 adopted children with direct contact arrangements in place with birth family's members. Due to the global pandemic, couple of contacts did not take place last year as they were cancelled either by the birth parent or the adopters. The contact was mostly with siblings, but there is an increase in the number of direct contact arrangements involving both birth parents and grandparents. Each child will have one, two or more direct contacts annually with one or more parties. Not all contacts could go ahead due to the pandemic, with either birth parents or adopters reluctant to have face to face contact during this time.

Contact arrangements require a great deal of time and sensitivity from the service. The post adoption social worker prepares adoptive family members and birth family members to ensure the best possible outcomes from these contacts. The contacts are emotional and require sensitivity and empathy on the part of the adoption social worker. Direct contacts are an important piece of work for the child as it assists identity formation, reinforces important attachments made to significant people and promotes the cultural identity. Direct contacts continue until the child is 18 or until either party requests a review to either increase or changing contacts arrangements to better meet the needs of the child.

9.5.3. Adoption Allowances

This function of the Adoption Service was not transferred to the Regional Adoption agency so a Bromley Finance has been undertaking all Adoption allowance reviews, overseen by the Head of Service for Permanence Service

A number of 48 adoption allowances were reviewed in 2020/21. This was primarily to pay regular adoption allowance payments in relation to adopted children. There were in addition to one-off payments made towards the costs of introductions and settling in allowance.

This payment is reviewed annually and is means tested.

10. Disruptions, Complaints & Allegations and Compliments

There were no placement or adoption disruptions during 2020/21, which is similar to the previous financial year.

There were two complaints in 2020/21

There were no allegations in 2020/21.

11. Future developments and priorities

As part of our drive for improving further on service delivery the action plan for the year ahead is to continue to:

- Aim for an 'outstanding' adoption service, by continuing to engage in the development of the Coram Ambitious for Adoption RAA, developing closer working relationships with the other Local Authorities which are part of the RAA in order to form a collective identity.
- Continue to work in partnership with the Regional Adoption Agencies to look at best practice and service delivery, share ideas and expertise. Our family finder is part of the Pan London Early Permanence steering group which meets regularly and looks at improving practice.
- To continue to further reduce the timescales for children with an adoption plan and to improve our Adoption scorecard by ensuring most of the children are matched with adopters within 4 months of the adoption order being made. We recognise the challenges of securing permanent families during a global pandemic, especially for sibling groups, older children and children with additional needs and we will continue to track and start family finding at the earliest opportunity.
- Continue to improve on the quality of CPRs and support plans for children with an adoption plan. Family finder is working closely with relevant teams at the pre-order stages, by attending Final Care Plan meetings and arranging regular family finding meetings for children with ADM decisions. Further relevant training to be organised, upskilling the workforce in writing good Child Permanence Reports which are a vital tool in identifying suitable families for children in need of an adoptive placement.

- Continue to develop the post-adoption assessment tools, in order to support the process of making decisions on the right intervention for the adoptive families. Workstreams are taking place across the RAA on a monthly basis looking at unifying adoption processes and procedures. The post adoption workstream was set up in January 2021.
- Continue to apply to the Adoption Support Fund in a timely manner; this financial year, the Post Adoption Team secured approximately 3 times more funds than the previous year. We have been able to add more names to the list of therapeutic independent providers which is shared with the other post adoption services across the RAA.
- Ensure that post adoption support services are offered on the basis of clear, transparent and individualised support plans, which are reviewed regularly, with financial support provided based on the child's individual needs; Bromley adopters are invited to attend bi-monthly coffee mornings and bi-monthly support workshops on relevant topics which are organised across the RAA.

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