

Service Pack

Care and Targeted Outcomes Adoption Service Plan

2014-15

Version Control

Owner: Nicky Pace/Roland Minto

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Service Overview

The service meets the Council's statutory duties in achieving timely adoptive placement for children for whom this has been identified as the primary plan.

Adoption Team

Staff - 1 Team Manager
4 FTE Social Worker/Senior Practitioner Posts
1 Administrator

(Plus use of shared Business Development Officer and Admin support)

Accountability

The service will meet its requirements under National Minimum Standard 25.6 by the provision of six monthly reports to Thurrock's Corporate Parenting Committee

Equality and Diversity

The local authority is under a statutory duty to advance equality and eliminate discrimination. This includes specific duties introduced by the Equality Act 2010 in relation to data and compliance.

Background

Thurrock Adoption Service was inspected by Ofsted in February 2012, and received an overall judgement of Good. Nevertheless a number of recommendations were made to improve the service, and an Action Plan was developed to address these. This plan was reviewed on a regular basis in 2012-13, with continued monitoring throughout 2013-14.

However, in line with both the high priority given to adoption nationally, and our own commitment to the continuous improvement of services, it is vital that this progress is maintained. This Action Plan outlines the key areas for development in 2014 – 2015, and also sets the plan within the overall context of Thurrock’s’ Care and Targeted Outcomes Plan for 2013-2016, as reviewed and revised in April 2014. The relevant updated sections of that plan are as follows:

Service Objective	Outcomes	Action / Outputs	Resources	Lead	Risk/Opp. Reference
Council Priority: Improve health and well-being					
Health and Well Being Strategy Priority 12: Provide outstanding services for children in care and leaving care					
Ensure that public care is reserved for those children for whom there is no safe and appropriate alternative and that those young people leaving care reach their full potential	Progress on the National Adoption Scorecard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce revised Adoption Development Plan for 2014-15, including clear target on recruitment of new Adopters • Negotiate appropriate use of 2014-15 Adoption Reform Grant, to strengthen Family Finding capacity • Development better tracking and monitoring systems, in conjunction with Annex A requirements, to demonstrate concerted focus on achieving timescales 		RMi RMi RMi/SQ/ Permanency Team	

The government has maintained its intention to heighten the profile of adoption as a means to provide permanent care since the publication of “An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay” in March 2012, which introduced the concept of “Adoption Scorecards”. These set out specific thresholds against two indicators, with clear minimum expectations for timeliness of actions in the adoption system. Performance thresholds make clear the government’s expectations for timeliness in the adoption system. The Government has made it clear that thresholds will be reduced incrementally to ensure national performance improves.

The key thresholds set by the Government are namely:-

- A1: average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted. The target for the 2013 to 2016 average (as measured during the 3 years 2013 to 2016) is 14 months
- A2: 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. The target for the 2013 to 2016 average (as measured during the 3 years 2013 to 2016) is 4 months
- A3: measures the number and percentage of children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (2013 to 2016)

The table below shows the projected tightening of performance against the first two targets:

Financial years	Indicator 1 threshold (months)	Indicator 2 threshold (months)
2010 to 2013	20	6
2011 to 2014	18	5
2012 to 2015	16	4
2013 to 2016	14	4

In January 2014 the most recent set of data was released, covering the three year period to March 31st 2013. Thurrock’s reported figures against the two targets were disappointing in the context of the hard work undertaken, as we exceeded both targets by a considerable margin. Our performance against A1 was 784 days (or approximately 25 months) and against A2 it was 323 days (or approximately 10 months). Although there were some contributory factors, it is important that we interpret this as a spur to continued improvement moving ahead, and this Action Plan forms the basis on which we intend to do so.

The keys ambitions for 2014-2015 remain broadly in line with 2013-2014, as follows:

- In conjunction with the Children’s Social Work Teams, maintain close scrutiny of all children entering care for whom Adoption is a potential outcome, to ensure no drift occurs and that the Adoption Team are appropriately involved from an early stage
- Ensure that all relevant cases are brought to the attention of the Agency Decision Maker, with appropriate paperwork completed to an acceptable standard, to enable a timely “Should be Placed Decision”
- Vigorous pursuit of Family Finding for Children for whom we have a Placement Order
- Reduction of the timescale between Family Finding and presentation of cases at Panel for Matching to the minimum possible
- Expansion of the pool of applicants to become Adopters
- Effective and professional production of good quality Prospective Adopter Reports
- Appropriate use of funding available from Central Government to progress the work of the service
- Review our capacity to deliver appropriate post adoption support in a timely manner
- Ensure that all Adoption Team activity is managed to reinforce the authority’s commitment to adhere to the 26 week target for completion of Care Proceedings.

A number of new developments were rolled out by central government in 2013-14, including key sections of the Children and Families Act 2014, and it is likely that further changes will follow. It is essential therefore to maintain close scrutiny of any changes in practice which will need to be implemented in response, and hence this action plan will need to be revisited on a regular basis and updated where necessary to acknowledge any wider policy or legislative changes

May 2014 Update

We have recently received notification that Havering will be withdrawing from our current Consortium arrangements with them and Southend. This poses an immediate challenge in identifying potential alternative partners, but also brings about an opportunity to review and challenge many aspects of how we have functioned in recent years. In this light therefore we need to embrace this change as an opportunity to reshape our external relationships and develop a more outward looking approach, giving us the possibility of importing fresh ideas that may stimulate positive growth.

Task / Objective	Action	Action by	Evidence
Maintain close scrutiny of all children entering care for whom Adoption is a potential outcome	<p>Consideration of all new entrants at Placement Panel</p> <p>Regular weekly scrutiny of all CLA on LCS reports</p> <p>Maintenance of monitoring sheet of all referred cases</p> <p>Maintenance of monthly monitoring sheets</p>	<p>RM</p> <p>RM/SQ</p> <p>SQ</p> <p>SQ</p>	<p>Social Workers referred to Adoption Team Manager for advice</p> <p>Proactive approaches to SW teams where cases have not been referred</p> <p>Discussion in Supervision between RM and SQ</p> <p>Up to date sheets circulated each month</p>
All relevant cases are brought to the attention of the Agency Decision Maker	<p>Timely referral to ADM following ILPM, including consultation with PA to ensure no delays in presentation</p> <p>Review and simplify process of consultation with Agency Adviser</p> <p>Attendance at Internal Legal Planning Meetings where requested</p>	<p>SQ (and Team Admin)</p> <p>RM/SQ</p> <p>SQ and Team</p>	<p>ADM sign off within 10-15 working days of ILPM</p> <p>Established and maintained target timescale for presentation to ADM</p> <p>Adoption advice apparent in Minutes</p>
Vigorous pursuit of Family Finding for Children	<p>Prompt allocation of cases following ADM decision</p> <p>Regular Family Finding Meetings following PO</p>	<p>SQ</p> <p>SQ and team</p>	<p>ICS updated</p> <p>Minutes of meetings</p>
Contribute to effective management of cases through Care Proceedings	Production of timely reports to Court where requested on process, progress and prognosis for Family Finding at request of Court, with personal attendance where necessary	SQ and Team Legal	Reports filed on time

Reduction of the timescale between Family Finding and presentation of cases at Panel	Prompt “linking” meetings after identification of possible Match Close liaison with Panel Adviser and Chair to agenda at first opportunity	SQ/RM SQ (Team Admin)	Minutes of meeting, with recorded timescales Minutes of meeting
Clarification of Adoption / Permanency Team roles in relation to maintenance of records on LCS	Completion of existing work on refining LCS process in relation to Children’s Cases, followed by roll out of training	RM/PC/SQ/AC/Lesley Tabrett	Accurate performance reports can be drawn down from LCS
Development of LCS recording in relation to recording of applicants to adopt	Exploration and development of LCS module on Adopters, and roll out to team	SQ/RM/Lesley Tabrett	Accurate performance reports can be drawn down from LCS
Expansion of the pool of applicants to become Adopters: Target for 2014-2015 = 20 new approvals by 31.3.15	Review of Advertising Strategy Deployment of additional funding from ARG Implementation of local information sessions to supplement Consortium Open Evenings Increase in frequency of Adoption Workshops Continued attendance of Business Development Officer at Monthly Adoption Team Meetings Active pursuit of opportunities to engage support of local faith based groups in heightening the positive profile of adoption	RM/ SQ/ Business Development Officer RM SQ SQ SQ /KD RM/SQ/KD	Renewed strategy Use of different media generating additional applicants Delivery of sessions producing more enquiries Delivery of workshops reducing delays for applicants Minutes of meeting Increase in appropriate enquiries
Effective and professional production of good quality Prospective Adopter Reports	Ensure all staff are familiar with new assessment process and timescales	SQ and team	Assessments presented at Panel within appropriate timescales

Ensure all Adoption Procedures and documentation, including Statement of Purpose, are updated	Identification of deadline dates of priorities for revision and allocation of responsibilities for each one	RM / SQ	All necessary procedures are updated and available
Appropriate use of funding available from Central Government	Plan to be devised to utilise 2014-2015 Adoption Reform Grant. Likely to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding for additional worker to increase assessment and Family Finding capacity Expenditure incurred on refresh of marketing materials (and possible additional expertise from Corporate Comms Team) Review potential to maintain additional admin support 	RM / AS (workforce development) RM / SQ	Production of training “brochure” and evidence of service wide attendance at training Worker in post, and minimal delays in allocation of new Assessments and Family Finding
Adoption Service generates income through inter-agency fees to sustain increased staffing capacity	Development of Business Case for use of ARG to provide capacity to increase Adopter Recruitment and Approval	RM / SQ	Sale/Purchase of Inter Agency Adopters balances to generate surplus
Review our capacity to deliver appropriate post adoption support	Meet with AT to look at current workload Ensure maximum use of 3Ts service for Adopters under pressure Possible use of external review of our “offer”	SQ RM (via MALAC) / AT /SQ RM / SQ	Consolidation of AT workload into manageable caseload Appropriate referrals being made and progressed Proposals on how to increase available supports

Review our current practice in making decisions about the appropriateness of placing siblings together or apart	Explore possible funding of attendance/buying in of training on sibling placements provided by Family Futures or similar	RM/AS	Evidence of more nuanced discussion in minutes of LPM and LAC reviews
Respond to recent decision by Havering to withdraw from current Consortium arrangements	Explore alternative partners for Consortium or possible joining with another existing Consortium	RM/SQ	New arrangements in place