

Post Order Support Services Commissioning Strategy

[DATE]



SURREY

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1. Introduction

This Surrey Post Order Commissioning Strategy outlines what we know about the post order support needs of adopted children and their families as well as children and families under a special guardianship order, and where the gaps are in service provision. To enable children and young people to reach their full potential, they and their families need seamless support when they are a looked after child to the point of the adoption order or special guardianship order and beyond at the appropriate stages of their lives.

Most children who have been adopted experienced abuse and neglect early on in life, and need therapeutic support. Adopted children are more at risk of developing a range of behavioural, cognitive, educational, emotional, and health and social problems than their peers. Adoptive parents, special guardians and their children therefore need to have access to the right therapeutic services to meet their needs. In recent years, national government policy has given much more prominence to adoption and support. The Children and Families Act 2014 introduced a number of reforms to help some children to move in sooner with the families who might want to adopt them; make it easier to find new parents for children who need to be adopted; help to find more people to adopt children; give families themselves a real choice in exactly who helps them after the adoption; and make it easier for people who want to adopt a child to look for the right child for them to adopt. The act also introduces new rights for adoptive families to support and leave from work.

The introduction of the Adoption Support Fund in light of findings from national research into post adoption support needs and adoption breakdown demonstrates a recognition from Central Government that more needs to be done to support adopted children and their families.

2. Background

Post Adoption

For the first three years after the adoption order is granted, the local authority responsible for placing an adopted child with their adoptive parents is responsible for the statutory assessment. After that, the responsibility lies with local authority where the adoptive family lives. The assessment covers a range of needs, from mental health and the need for therapeutic services to additional support during a child's education. This is in addition to the financial benefits and allowances that all families, depending on their circumstances, are entitled to.

However, although the local authority is legally required to carry out the assessment, they are not legally required to provide the support that an assessment may reveal they need. Instead, provision of post-adoption support services to families is currently at the local authority's discretion.

If a local authority decides to provide post-adoption support, they can deliver this support themselves or commission outside agencies such as registered adoption-support agencies or NHS practitioners to deliver the support. For example, they may do this by referring their adopters to the Adoption UK Family Support Service and funding this.

Post Special Guardianship Order

Special guardianship order is an order appointing one or more individuals to be a child's 'special guardian'. It is a private law order made under the Children Act 1989 and is intended for those

children who cannot live with their birth parents and who would benefit from a legally secure placement.

This order discharges any existing care order or related section 34 Contact Order. It confers parental responsibility, which can be exercised to the exclusion of any other person with parental responsibility apart from another special guardian. The special guardian has responsibility for day to day decisions relating to a child's care and upbringing. This order allows a special guardian to remove a child from the UK for up to three months without consent of others with Parental Responsibility or the leave of the court. The court can give permission for the child to be taken out of the jurisdiction for longer than three months. On making a special guardianship order the court may give leave for the child to be known by a new surname.

If a child lives with a special guardian, they keep their legal ties to their birth family and are no longer "looked after" by the local authority.

The local authority must make provision for a range of Special Guardianship support services. Special Guardianship support services are defined as:

- Financial support (inc Legal Fees up to a max of 5 sessions at legal aid rates for foster carers)
- Services to enable children, Special Guardians and parents to discuss matters relating to the arrangements for the child
- Assistance including mediation in relation to contact between the child and their parents, relatives or significant others
- Therapeutic services for the child
- Assistance to ensure continuance of the relationship between the child and the Special Guardian, including training to meet any special needs of the child (including access to the Surrey foster carer training program for ex foster carers), respite care, and mediation
- Counselling, advice and information
- Support Groups (inc current Surrey fostering support groups)
- An allocated Support Worker from the Surrey Fostering Team (or an equivalent local support service if available for arrangements in other local authorities) for ex foster carers
- Advice and Assistance from Leaving Care Services for young people aged 16 – 21 years.

Support services should not be seen in isolation from mainstream services and it is important to ensure that families are assisted in accessing mainstream services and are aware of their entitlements to tax credits and social security benefits.

Where the child was previously Looked After, the local authority that looked after the child has responsibility for providing support for the first three years after the making of a Special Guardianship Order.

If a child is not Looked After, the local authority where the Special Guardian lives has the responsibility for Special Guardianship support.

Evidence of need for post order support services

Adoption

In 2014, the Hadley Centre for Adoption and Foster Care Studies, based in the School for Policy Studies at the University of Bristol carried out a research project on adoption disruption. Researchers analysed national data on 37,335 adoptions over a 12 year period which showed that 3.2 % of children – around three in 100 - move out of their adoptive home prematurely, known as a

‘disruption’. It found that adoptions were more likely to breakdown if a child was placed once they were over the age of four. Most adoptions breakdown during the teenage years with teenagers 10 times more at risk of disruption compared with children under the age of four. This is a significant finding as post adoption support services tend to focus on providing support in the early years of the placement. There are very few services for adopted young people and those parenting adopted teenagers.

Research carried out by The Childhood and Wellbeing Research Centre in 2013 found that it is common for families to request an assessment for post adoption support when they are at crisis point (when the adoption is at risk of breakdown), with just over three quarters of local authorities who had responded to a survey on this topic stating that families ‘very often’ or ‘often’ request an assessment at this stage.¹ As families are not obliged to keep in touch with social workers after the adoption order, adoption agencies would not know whether or not families are struggling unless they are approached for support.

Special Guardianship Order

In November 2014, the University of York and BAAF published its research report, ‘Investigating Special Guardianship: experiences, challenges and outcomes’.

This research highlights that children are more likely to experience a disruption where:

- They were older at the time the SGO was made (being a teenager was the most important predictor in both the national and survey datasets);
- Where they were not last placed with a relative before the SGO was made;
- Where the SGO was made to a carer with whom the child had not been living;
- Where the bond between carer and child was not rated as having been strong at the time of the SGO (based on survey data only);
- Where looked after children had experienced more past placement moves.

The research found that the majority of Orders are made when the child is young – 83% before the age of 10 years old and 17.5% when the child is older 920 were made when the adolescent was 17). Therefore SGOs do provide a route out of care for some older looked after children.²

The reasons for entry into care for children under a SGO tend to be similar to adoption – abuse/neglect, child disability and parental illness/disability being the most common reasons.

The report highlights the importance of social services maintaining a continuing link with families some time after the order is made, to avoid the difficulties of carers having to cold call the social care duty team at a time of need. Annual ‘how’s it going’ visits, links through newsletters and social activities are important ways of maintaining these links and making a return for help easier. Furthermore, this is key for those who may not have had a positive experience with social workers in the past.

Concerns about special guardianship orders include:

- Tensions within families
- Concerns about own ability to provide long term care

¹ The Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre. Post adoption support: A rapid response survey of local authorities in England Working Paper no. 19. May 2013 [accessed on 13 August 2015]. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/193441/CWRC-00045-2013.pdf

² The research included a casefile audit of 224 files.

- Child to be settled before order is granted
- Getting enough support (including financial support)
- Not fully understanding the implications of SGO.

Challenges experienced:

- Difficulties involved in caring and advocating for children with complex long term physical and / or mental health conditions
- Anxiety associated with managing children with aggressive or unpredictable behavioural patterns
- Strained relationship between guardian and child's birth parents
- Financial strain, lack of leisure time or possibilities for a break from the caring role
- Transition arrangements from one local authority to another are not smooth

Age is a powerful predictor of disruption. Young children are less likely than older ones to be able to disrupt placements when they are unhappy. Older children had almost always come to Special Guardianship later. Like late entrants to care or adoption, they were also more likely to have come with more established patterns of challenging behaviour. Two-thirds of children in their survey sample whose placements disrupted before the age of 17 were rated as having severe emotional and behavioural difficulties. The older children were when the SGO was made, the more likely it was that they would score more highly for emotional disturbance.

Adoption Support Fund

Recognising the challenges some families face in accessing therapeutic post adoption support, the Department for Education launched the Adoption Support Fund in 2015. The Adoption Support Fund will pay for therapeutic services and support including:

- Training for adoptive parents(e.g. therapeutic parenting courses)
- Further, more complex assessment where required (e.g. CAMHS assessment, multidisciplinary assessment including education and health, cognitive and neuropsychological assessment, other mental health assessment)
- Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy- integrative method of psychotherapy developed for the treatment of children and young people who manifest serious psychological problems associated with complex trauma and serious failure to establish secure patterns of attachment.
- Theraplay- interactive play between child/young person and parent to strengthen the parent-child attachment. Sessions guided by a therapist.
- Filial therapy- specific type of theraplay, parent usually conducts the session.
- Music therapy
- Art therapy
- Drama therapy
- Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing- psychological treatment method which stimulates the brain to reduce intensity of distressing memories, for example a therapist asking the child to move their eyes from left to right to stimulate blocked information.
- Non-violent resistance- a psychological approach for overcoming destructive, aggressive, controlling and risk-taking behaviour
- Therapy such as those mentioned above, when provided as part of a short break, course or package
- Therapy such as those mentioned above, when commissioned pre-adoption order but delivery extends post-adoption order

- Therapeutic support where the child is under a section 20 order and there is a possibility of the child being reunited with their adoptive parents
- Extensive therapeutic life story work

The following legislation governs our commissioning in relation to adoption and special guardianship:

- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Adoption Support Service Regulations 2005
- National minimum Standards for Adoption 2014 (NMS 15)
- Special Guardianship Regulations 2005

3. Profile and Needs Analysis

The Statistical First Release provides information on looked-after children (including adoption) at both national and local authority levels for the financial year 2013 to 2014.³

National picture

- There were 5,050 looked after children adopted during the year ending 31 March 2014, an increase of 26% from 2013 and an increase of 58% from 2010. Although the number of looked after children adopted fell between 2010 and 2011, the number of these adoptions has since increased and is now at its highest point since the start of the current collection in 1992.
- The number of children placed for adoption rose between 2010 and 2013, but has decreased very slightly in 2014. There were 3,580 looked after children placed for adoption at 31 March 2014 representing 5% of all looked after children. The numbers placed for adoption have increased by 42% from 2010.
- There was also an increase in the percentage of children ceasing to be looked after because they were adopted from 13% in 2010 to 17% in 2014.
- The number of looked after children placed for adoption at 31 March, which rose from 2010 to 2013, has decreased very slightly in 2014.
- Of all looked after children adopted in 2014, the majority (76%) were aged 1 to 4. The rise in the number of adoptions is largely due to the increase in 1 to 4 year olds adopted, an increase of 70% from 2010 to 2014. The average age at adoption is 3 years 5 months – 3 months younger than in 2013, and 6 months younger than in 2010.
- The percentage of children ceasing care with a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) has increased over the period 2010 to 2014. In 2014 there were 3,330 children leaving care with a SGO, 11% of all children ceasing to be looked after, up from 5% in 2010.

The number of looked after children in England who were adopted has increased between 2010 and 2014.

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
All looked after children at 31 March	64,470	65,500	67,070	68,060	68,840
All looked after children who were	3,200	3,100	3,470	4,010	5,050

³ Department for Education: Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending March 2014 [accessed 13 August 2015]. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption--2>

adopted during the year ending 31 March					
Age at adoption (years)	3,200	3,100	3,470	4,010	5,050
Under 1	70	60	80	90	180
1 to 4	2,250	2,210	2,570	2,980	3,840
5 to 9	780	730	740	860	960
10 to 15	100	90	80	70	70
16 and over	10	x	10	10	X

Source: Department for Education. Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending March 2014

In England, the percentage of children ceasing care with a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) has increased over the period 2010 to 2014. In 2014 there were 3,330 children leaving care with a SGO, 11% of all children ceasing to be looked after, up from 5% in 2010.⁴

The number of children in England who ceased to be looked after following a special guardianship order:

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
All looked after children at 31 March	64,470	65,500	67,070	68,060	68,840
Special Guardianship Order	1,290	1,780	2,150	2,770	3,330

Source: Department for Education. Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending March 2014

Local picture in Surrey

Adoption

- 54 children had adoption plans (as at 31st March 2014).
- In 2014, 14% of children in Surrey ceased to be looked after as they were adopted.
- 50 looked after children were adopted in 2014-15. Of all looked after children adopted in 2014-2015, the majority (86%) were aged 1 to 4 years old.
- A deep dive into 35 Post Order Support Needs Assessments (POSNA) complete in 2014-2015 demonstrates that adoptive families experience a high level of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Children demonstrate challenging behaviours, such as difficulties in forming close relationships, avoiding intimacy and comfort, are controlling / manipulative, have sleep problems, poor self care, and play truant. There is also aggression, with child to parent violence taking place, self harm and sexual behaviour.
- A range of post adoption support services are recommended in POSNA action plans, with the most common being educational psychologists, therapy, therapeutic parenting training, life story work and parenting advice and strategies.

Special Guardianship Order

The table below gives the actual numbers of orders granted in the last 6 years in Surrey.

⁴ Department for Education: Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending March 2014 [accessed 30 September 2015]. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/359277/SFR36_2014_Text.pdf

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Adopted	26	47	43	37	35	59
SGO	25	24	18	23	45	66
Total Orders in Year	51	71	61	60	80	125
% of LAC cohort at year end	8.5%	12.3%	10.8%	9.8%	12.4%	19.4%

Source: Surrey Children's Service Performance Data - Adoptions & Special Guardianship Orders – Notes on Performance to March 14

In 2012-13, SGOs exceeded adoptions to make up 56% of total orders, indicating their increasing significance in achieving permanence for children. This significance continued in 2013/14, when SGOs once again exceeded adoptions, to make up 53% of order granted.

The number of children placed for adoption, as at March 2014, had risen by 23% overall in the past 6 years.

The concept of permanency for looked after children, of being able to grow up knowing who you are and where you belong, has been of increased importance over the last few years as our understanding of the impact of this on a child's development and transition to adulthood has improved.

Historically adoption was deemed to be the main route to achieving permanency for a child. However, whilst adoption brings many strengths for children, it does represent an absolute change – of ending of ties with one family and the creating new bonds with another.

Feedback from adoptive parents

We engaged with adoptive parents through forums and focus groups, as well as an online survey to understand what the needs are of adopted children and their families.

Feedback through the online survey and focus groups highlighted the following areas:

- **Adoption selection / matching process** – some parents queried how this happens and felt that children are moved into families quickly.
- **Schools** – staff need more of an understanding about adoption so they are equipped to support children and young people who have been adopted. Some parents had made schools aware that their child is adopted but not all. Schools staff may benefit from a booklet that offers an understanding of how a child's past experiences can affect their ability to cope within school. In addition schools should be proactive in speaking to parents and asking them if they are happy for the school to let other teachers know when a child has been adopted.
- **Contact from the Adoption Service** – parents would welcome the adoption service checking in with them every few years e.g. when child is 5 years old and 10 years old, unless the family has expressed they don't want interaction. This only has to be light touch and it would be of benefit during key developmental and transition points, for example when a child moves from primary school to secondary school.
- **Structure of the Adoption Service** – some parents feedback that they thought the adoption service needed to be reviewed.
- **Respite** – there is no respite provision available to families; the need to re-charge their batteries was cited by some families. It would be useful to have this as an option to take up one weekend on occasion, in the same way respite is available for foster care.

- **Therapeutic respite** - there would need to be a consistent range of activities available and for children and young people of all ages. Parents also need reassurance that professionals working with the children and young people have an understanding of adoption and that the relationship the professional has with the child/ young person is built up over time so they are comfortable.
- **Extended Hours** - parents would like to know that this support is available if a crisis occurs.
- **Access to services** – Training and counselling sessions need to take place at appropriate times and venues that are local to Surrey and its borders. Providers also need to be available at short notice. Adoptive parents also feedback that telephone support and counselling is limited.
- **Training** – therapeutic parenting training should take place earlier. It would also be useful for the training to be made available in alternative formats e.g. virtual or e-learning environments, so they can be accessed at a convenient time to the adoptive parent(s). Both parents cannot always attend the training course on the same date. One parent should attend the course on one occasion and their partner be invited to attend the same course on another occasion.
- **Emotional wellbeing and mental health** – therapeutic support needs to be offered over a sustained period of time and this should not be restricted to being provided by CAMHS. Support also needs to be made available after 4pm and the location needs to be flexible to the child / young person, as a clinical office environment may make them feel ashamed or unsettled.
- **Social Media** – the advent of social media means that birth relatives are able to circumvent contact arrangements. This engagement is not always welcomed nor positive, and parents and their children need support in dealing with this.
- **Adoption Support Fund** – administration of the fund needs to be smoother, particularly when there is no continuity in services being paid for by the ASF. Currently, if it is recognised that further support is needed .e.g. more appointments, a fresh application needs to be made to the fund and await approval before support can continue, which has an impact on the child / young person receiving the service
- **Buddying** – some parents have used the telephone buddy for support and found it very useful however this was cut short when one of the buddies was no longer available. In another instance, one of the parents knew the buddy allocated to them and was not comfortable in discussing their personal circumstances with them. Other parents have commented that it took 6 weeks to be allocated a buddy, however they needed someone to speak to earlier.
- **Early intervention** – the right professionals need to be involved from the beginning, and then work with the parents over time to reduce support as appropriate. There may then be instances in future where the professional needs to re-engage with the family.
- **Adoption through an adoption agency** – it is not clear what support is available post order.
- **Impact on relationships** – challenges faced by families post adoption has had a negative impact on the parents relationship with each other. It would be useful for support to be available for this.
- **Moving between local authority areas** – there is a lack of information sharing between local authorities which makes it difficult for adoptive families to access services in their new local authority area
- **Transition between Children’s and Adult Services** - a support buddy for the adopted child would be beneficial to support them through the transition to Adult Services.
- **Child and Parent Voice** – parents feel they have had to push hard to get their child’s needs heard, particularly regarding access to CAMHS services. This has led to some families self funding private counselling and psychiatrist services so their child gets the support they need.

- **Post Order Support Plan** – this outlined the support that should be received, but it did not materialise or were told it was unavailable.

Key issues

- **Incoming families to Surrey** – no background information on adoption order from other local authority areas
- **Increase in orders granted** – this may have significant resource implications and present issues in ensuring the market is in place to meet post order support needs.
- **Adoption breakdown** - most adoptions breakdown during the teenage years, demonstrating a need for early intervention.
- **Emotional wellbeing and mental health** – children adopted from care and those under a special guardianship order have often experienced neglect and abuse and therefore may have a range of complex needs.

4. Overview of Services

Staffing of Surrey County Council’s Adoption Service

Team Manager	1.0 FTE
Assistant Team Manager	4.0 FTE
Social Workers	15.0 FTE
Assistant Social Workers	3.0 FTE
Business Support	7.0 FTE

In addition the following are commissioned by the Adoption Service:

- Independent Chair of the Adoption Panel
- Adult psychotherapist -1 day per week, provides consultation for adopters and carers
- 2 educational psychologists-seconded 1 day a week each

Surrey County Council’s Adoption Service delivers a number of post adoption support services:

- 3 to 4 family events a year for adoptive families.
- Secure website for Surrey adopters, and regular newsletter with contributions from adopters and adoption workers.
- Monthly training events with guest speakers.
- Fortnightly adoptive parent and toddler group.
- Monthly daytime drop-in for adoptive families, with opportunity for one off consultations with a social worker or educational psychologist
- Children’s groups for adopted children with plans to offer a youth group from October 2015

Staffing of Surrey County Council’s Family and Friends Team (function of the Fostering West Team)

Assistant Team Managers	2.0 FTE
Social Workers	7.0 FTE
Family Support Workers	3.8 FTE

Commissioned Services

Surrey County Council also commissions a number of post adoption support services through service level agreements:

- Adoption UK – adoptive parents can be teamed up with an adoption buddy or parent-mentor (an experienced adopter trained to support other families), family support and training programmes.
- Post Adoption Centre – provide support and advice on parenting adopted children.
- A therapeutic training course for adoptive parents (externally commissioned).

A number of post adoption support services are also commissioned for individual families on a case by case basis.

5. Overview of Finance

In 2014/15, the council spent over £50,000 on commissioned post adoption support services, for both casework and on service level agreements.

The county council's Adoption Service has made 63 bids to the adoption support fund to date (May 2015 to February 2016), for a total of £257,256.

Services commissioned include neurological attachment assessments, sensory attachment assessments, autism specialists, Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy.

The Department for Education has confirmed that the Adoption Support Fund will be in place for a further 4 years, with increased funding.

6. Gap Analysis

Based on the profile of adopted children and their families, our engagement with adoptive parents, the needs analysis and the overview of services and finance, a number of gaps in provision have been identified. These are areas where support is either unavailable or is in short supply. These areas are:

- **Therapeutic interventions for children** – thresholds for accessing services, for example CAMHS, are restricted to those with high level specific needs. Children need support in overcoming trauma experienced earlier on in their life. Adopted children are not currently included in the remit of the 3Cs service which is available to looked after children and has a holistic ethos which is more suited to the needs of children with developmental trauma than a medically governed CAMHS service
- **Continued contact by the Adoption Service and Friends and Family Team** – keeping in touch with families, particularly at transitional and developmental points in a child's life, so that families can raise any challenges or concerns early on
- **Support in Schools** – children need support when transitioning between primary school to secondary school and at key development stages. Schools staff also need to understand more about adoption and special guardianship orders, factors which result in challenging behaviours and how to support them.

- **Parenting training** – therapeutic parenting training including access to parenting strategies at all stages of the child’s development.
- **Short breaks or therapeutic respite** – the council does not have short breaks or therapeutic respite provision for adopted children or those under a special guardianship order.

7. Next Steps: Taking this strategy forwards

This strategy depends on developing a joined up response across children’s services to establish a permanency pathway.

We need to develop stronger, more seamless internal processes to support families both pre order and post order. This will include looking at how teams within the council are structured and how they can best operate to meet the needs of children, young people and their families.

Services that we equip families to build resilience and to develop skills to respond to the child’s triggers at the earliest opportunity.

For those families who are in crisis, we need to build a joined up team around the family to support the family to meet needs as effectively as possible.

8. Commissioning Priorities

Fulfilling our commissioning intentions

Post order support must be embedded as part of one overall permanency pathway for children, young people and their families to create a seamless link between care and permanency. This may also include exploring setting up a post order support service within the local authority.

Adopted children and children under a special guardianship order to have the same access to services as looked after children e.g. support from specialist CAMHS such as 3Cs and access to the Virtual School. We will also explore opportunities, such as social pedagogy for adopters and special guardians.

Early intervention is the overarching theme, whereby we identify needs at the earliest opportunity and prevent crisis, and offer timely assessment of need and relevant services

Developing appropriate partnerships and access to targeted services such as the council’s Youth Support Service.

We must also respond to the needs of families at times of crisis to avoid the need for accommodation, by offering improved access to services such as Extended Hours and HOPE.

The following priorities have been identified as core commissioning intentions in Surrey:

1. Building on our current support services, for example educational psychologists
2. Reparenting support which can address:
 - a. Longitudinal challenges of adoption– understanding identity and life story

- b. Preparing for teenage years – warning systems and early intervention to reduce the potential for crisis.
 - c. Understanding the impact of attachment and trauma
 - d. Bespoke support to individual family needs
3. Theraplay as embedded through the journey for children and young people from early stages of family coming together through to longer term permanence.
 4. Systematic family therapy including bespoke therapeutic packages from point of order to build family resilience against childhood needs.

Post order support for adopted children and their families and special guardians will need to meet the following outcomes:

- Improved relationships with peers
- Improved relationships with siblings, parents and other family members
- Improved relationships with teachers and school staff
- Improved engagement with learning
- Improved emotional regulation
- Improved behaviour management
- Improved confidence
- Improved ability to enjoy a positive family life and social relationships
- Reduced child on parent violence