

Date of issue: Tuesday 14th November 2023

MEETING:	CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL
	<u>VOTING MEMBERS</u> Councillors Hulme (Chair), , Dauti, Gill, Rana Tomar and Qaseem
	<u>NON VOTING MEMBERS</u> (Required to attend all meetings, or to nominate a substitute in the event of their absence)
	Director of Children’s Services, Chief Executive of Slough Children First (SCF) – Sue Butcher Accommodation Group Manager, Housing – Caroline Bartos (SBC) Foster Carer – Lianne Garstang (SCF) NHS Frimley ICB – Lynette Jones-Jardine Thames Valley Police – James Mather Virtual School Head – Cherie Sears ((SCF) Community Group Manager - Liz Jones (SBC)
DATE AND TIME:	TUESDAY, 21ST NOVEMBER, 2023 AT 5.30 PM
VENUE:	MEETING ROOM 2, SECOND FLOOR, THE CURVE, WILLIAM STREET, SLOUGH, SL1 1XY
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER: (for all enquiries)	NADIA WILLIAMS 07749 709 961

NOTICE OF MEETING

You are requested to attend the above Meeting at the time and date indicated to deal with the business set out in the following agenda.

**AGENDA
PART I**

<u>AGENDA ITEM</u>	<u>REPORT TITLE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>	<u>LEAD</u>
	Apologies for absence.		
1.	Declarations of Interest		

All Members who believe they have a Disclosable Pecuniary or other Interest in any matter to be



AGENDA
ITEM

REPORT TITLE

PAGE

LEAD

considered at the meeting must declare that interest and, having regard to the circumstances described in Section 9 and Appendix B of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, leave the meeting while the matter is discussed.

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| 2. | Minutes of the last meeting held on 21 September 2023 | 1 - 6 |
| 3. | Feedback from Development Session and Next Steps | |

DISCUSSION

- | | | |
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| 4. | Children, Young People and the Corporate Parenting Panel | |
| 5. | Draft Corporate Parenting Action Plan 2023/24 - Update | |
| 6. | Corporate Parenting Panel Scorecard | |
| 7. | Sufficiency Strategy - Taking it Forward | 7 - 20 |
| 8. | Corporate Parenting Strategy - Update on Progress | |
| 9. | Annual Adoption Report - April 2022 to March 2023 | 21 - 32 |
| 10. | Local Offer for Care Experienced Young People (CEYP) | |

INFORMATION

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| 11. | Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Reporting Schedule/Themed Topics | 33 - 34 |
| 12. | Members Attendance Record | 35 - 36 |
| 13. | Date of the next meeting: Date of next meeting - Tuesday 16 January 2024 | |

Private Meeting

This meeting is not open to the public.



Corporate Parenting Panel – Meeting held on Thursday, 21st September, 2023.

Present:- Councillors Hulme (Chair), Dauti, Gill, Qaseem, Rana and Tomar

Non-Voting Members

Sue Butcher, Executive Director of People (Children) & CE of Slough Children First (SCF)

Liz Jones, Communities Group Manager (SBC)

NHS Frimley ICB

In Attendance:

Reshma Bessesar, Head of Service, Children Looked After (SCF)

Kay Jones, Head of Service, Sufficiency & Permanency (SCF)

Yemi Ukwenu, IFA Registered Manager (SCF)

Kate McCorriston, Head of Service, HR & OD (SCF)

Awais Raza, Performance Manager (SCF)

Saima Arif, Head of Regulated Services (SCF)

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Kelly and Lianne Garstang , Lynette Jones-Jardine,

PART 1

11. Declarations of Interest

Councillor (Cllr) Dauti declared a personal interest by virtue of providing an individual support group for Kinship Carers, and as a carer.

12. Minutes of the last meeting held on 18 July 2023

The Panel Resolved to: Agree the minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2023 as a correct record, subject to it being amended to note that:

- Cllr Rana was present at the meeting.
- The next meeting would be on 21 November, as a workshop would be held on 26 October date.

13. Changes to the CPP Terms of Reference - Draft for Consideration

The Panel considered a draft proposed revised Corporate Parenting (CPP) Terms of Reference (TOR). It noted that the amendments had been submitted following recommendation from the LGA review and alignment with best practice from other local authorities.

(Cllr Gill joined the meeting).

During discussion, the Panel made the following comments:

Corporate Parenting Panel - 21.09.23

- Welcomed the inclusion of the CPP vision and further expansion of the responsibilities of the Panel (At point 4). It was felt that this would provide a better understanding to new panel members.
- Noted recommended membership (At point 5) from all agencies, particularly strategic managers - key to strengthening the effectiveness of the panel. It was acknowledged that regular attendance was needed from all agencies and that the Chair would write to the Director of Housing regarding this issue.
- Highlighted that in July 2023, the Council had agreed to make care experience a protected characteristic.
- Accepted the increase in the frequency of meetings to bi-monthly, which equated to 6 meetings in the municipal year.

The Panel welcomed the changes and noted that once agreed, the proposed revised TOR would need to be agreed by the Member Panel for the Constitution and ratified at a Council meeting.

The Panel Resolved to: Agree the proposed Changes to the CPP Terms of Reference, subject to it being reported to and agreed by the Member Panel for the Constitution and ratified at a Council meeting.

14. Next Steps and Forward Plan:

The Head of Service, Sufficiency & Permanency introduced the Corporate Parenting Action Plan, and Annual reporting/participation themes papers.

Draft Corporate Parenting Action Plan 2023/24

Members were informed that the draft Action Plan was a live document which covered specific themed areas, and that a Task and Finish group (T & F) should be set up with strategic partners to work on implementing planned actions.

Members were encouraged to submit ideas and views to the Head of Service, Sufficiency & Permanency, on how the action plan could be developed further.

Areas requiring further development were highlighted as follows:

- Point 3 – Overarching Aim – Further Development of our Local Offer for CEYP (Care experienced young people). The Panel agreed that as care experience was now a protected characteristic, the category should be included under the equalities impact section of the Council's report template.

The Director of Children's Services Chief Executive SCF would take the suggestion to the senior leadership team.

It was noted that full details regarding the Care Leaver Local Offer was available at:

<https://www.sloughchildrenfirst.co.uk/care-leaver-local-offer/>

- Cllr Tomar made an offered of free cricket club membership to be included in the local offer.
- Point 4 - Overarching Aim – Ensure Active Participation and Engagement with our CLA (Children looked after) and CEYP.
- Point 3 – Overarching Aim – Themed activities linked to Pledges (to become promises).

The Head of Service, Sufficiency & Permanency would provide an updated version of the CPP Action Plan at the next meeting on 21 November 2023.

Annual Reporting/Participation Themes

Members noted the themed activities set out in the CPP Annual Reporting Schedule/Themed Topic, which provided a list of topics for each meeting and included forthcoming events throughout the year. The schedule also provided Panel members the opportunity, as champions, and as corporate parents to share the information with others as appropriate.

In respect of dates for the 2024 municipal year, these would be confirmed after the committee meeting dates had been agreed at Council in due course.

Members were invited to notify the Head of Service, Sufficiency & Permanency of any forthcoming events to be included in the schedule. The Neighbourhood Manager would send details regarding events at the leisure centre.

During discussion, the Panel agreed that some meetings would need to be arranged at informal settings to encourage young people to participate, and to share their views with Panel members.

The Panel Resolved to: To note the Next Steps and Forward Plan Including the Corporate Parenting Action Plan and the Annual reporting/participation themes.

15. Revised Corporate Parenting Panel Score Card

The Head of Service, Children Looked After and Support Service presented the revised CPP Score Card to August 2023, which had been simplified with reduced data.

The Panel's views and comments were sought on the revised format, which now also provided explanations.

Members reviewed the new format and made the following comments:

- Noted that there had been a reduction in CLAs to 231 compared to 244 in August (Aug) 2022.
- Asked for demographics to be presented in text rather than in graphics format.

- Noted that the number of children entering care (Year to Date) had dropped from 64 in Aug 2022 to 32 in Aug 2023, whereas the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children had increase from 21 to 28 in the same comparative period.
- Requested data on the number of missing children, with explanation of where they were located. The Panel was advised that work was still in progress in this area, including the need to develop clear definitions of missing children, from children who had gone away.
- Acknowledged that 68% of exits from care were for positive reasons but asked for details to be provided about the position of the remaining 32% of children.

In answer to a question as to whether contingency plans were in place for missing children, it was explained that some children may have been adopted, placed in special guardianship order or moved into living independently.

The Panel Resolved to: To note the CPP Score card and comments on the revised format to be taken into account for the next CPP meeting.

16. Fostering Annual report

The Service Manager, Slough Children First (SCF), Independent Fostering agency, introduced the SCF Independent Fostering Agency 2022-23 Annual Report.

The report set out details of activities that had been undertaken to provide safe and secure foster care placements for children looked after (CLA). It also provided an overview of measures that had been taken to increase the recruitment and retention of in-house foster carers.

During a presentation the following points were raised:

- There were 45 mainstream foster careering household and 81 individual foster carers on 31 March 2023.
- For single household foster carers, 36 were males and 45 females.
- The carers age ranged from 20-24 (the youngest) and 60 – 65 (the oldest) with the average between 40 and 49.
- Further work was needed to recruit more carers and for succession planning and management.
- The majority of carers were white British, which meant that ways of recruiting carers from diverse background needed to be further explored.
- The highest fostering requirement was for children aged 10 and over, whilst young people tended to remained with their foster carers through 'Staying Put' arrangements.
- There had been a recent celebration of the longest serving foster carer who had been fostering for 20 years.

The Chair stated that such long term fostering achievements should be announced at a Council meeting and asked for the Service Manager, SCF Independent Fostering Agency to provide further details.

Members were informed that there were proposals to increase respite support for foster carers, as part of the Sufficiency Strategy, which had also led to the increase in Recruited Households to seven in 2023, compared to two in 2022. It was however acknowledged that much work was still needed to increase carers for difficult placements, such as large sibling groups. A wrap around service was being provided as part of the Retention of Carers and included training.

It was further noted that there had been 9 resignations post Covid and this included some foster carers who had returned to work. The SCF Independent Fostering Agency had received a rating of 'good' at the Ofsted inspection in 2021, with two specific requirements relating to panel and foster carer recording log claims.

The Panel Resolved to: To note SCF Independent Fostering Agency 2022-23 Annual Report.

17. Discussion about LGA Workshop: CPP Vision, Aims and Best Practice Approach

The date of the LGA workshop was confirmed as Thursday 26 October 2023 from 4.30pm to 7.30pm at the Curve, Slough.

18. Members' Attendance Record

The Panel Resolved to: Note the Members' attendance record.

19. Date of the next meeting: Tuesday 21 November 2023

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 21 November 2023

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 5.37 pm and closed at 7.06 pm)

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Slough Children First Sufficiency Strategy

Sufficiency duty



The Sufficiency Duty (Section 22G of the Children Act 1989) requires all Local Authorities (LAs) to take strategic actions to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for children in their care within their local authority area, and for those children who require accommodation to promote their welfare; that meets their needs.



Each statutory partner as determined under Section 10 are '***required to co-operate with the local authority in making those arrangements***'.



Right Home, in the Right Place, at the Right Time

Corporate Parenting Priorities

1. Supporting engagement and achievement in education, training, and employment.
2. Ensuring that our children looked after and care experienced young people have stable homes and the right help.
3. We will listen and respond to the voice of our children, young people, and care experienced young people. They will help to develop and shape our strategic plans and delivery of services.
4. Ensuring that our children, young people, and care experienced young people are healthy. We will help our children and care experienced young people to have access to help for their physical needs and emotional wellbeing.
5. Developing a highly effective Care Leavers partnership to provide ongoing help in a variety of ways for them.
6. Supporting children, young people and care experienced young people to have fun and have new experiences to develop their own interests.



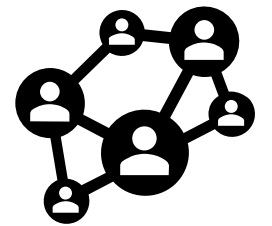
Sufficiency Priorities

- **Strengthen Early Help, Edge of Care and reunification**
- **Fostering – recruitment, retention and development**
- **Robust commissioning framework**
- **Achieving Permanence at the earliest opportunity**
- **Leaving care**



Strengthen Early Help, Edge of Care and reunification

- ✓ Proportionate early help and edge of care services to support families to make sustained change and prevent escalation and children being taken into care – ‘intensive’ targeted support.
- ✓ Creating an Edge of Care team, supporting families to stay together and be reunified
- ✓ Resisting all admissions to care for children aged 15+; unless significant and critical safeguarding risk
- ✓ Intense Edge of Care services to support reunification if children can return to their homes; impact for children in the 8 to 13y age group





Fostering – recruitment, retention & development

- ✓ Revision of our communication and marketing strategy for the recruitment of foster carers; ambitious and targeted approach
- ✓ Develop a fostering model specifically focussed for children with more complex needs; preventing the need for residential care (step forward/Resilience fostering model)
- ✓ Increase foster carer training and development opportunities; strengthening their skill set
- ✓ Rebrand our fostering service to create a clear vision and imagery to support recruitment - 'Our Slough Family'





Robust commissioning framework

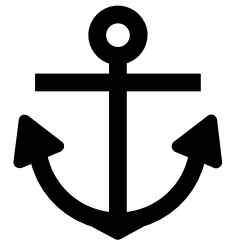
- ✓ Introduce a robust commissioning framework for all types of provision; improving arrangements with local providers and reducing the reliance on spot purchase provision
- ✓ Aim to provide homes for children in Slough and in their local area
- ✓ Working closely with local providers to reshape the market and increase availability of homes in Slough
- ✓ Improve our commissioning and contract management through External Placement Panel and tracking process'
- ✓ Work with health partners to develop a range of appropriate services to ensure emotional and mental health needs are met





Achieving Permanence at the earliest opportunity

- ✓ Providing children with long-term placement stability, where appropriate leave care, return home or seek legal permanence via other arrangements e.g. SGO
- ✓ Review and redesign of our Placement Service
- ✓ Strengthening our assessment of connected carers at the point of viability (Reg, 24 process)
- ✓ Introduce a centralised Permanency Monitoring Group
- ✓ Review our Stability meeting process in practice
- ✓ Ensure transition planning with adults' services are robust and provide early identification of need

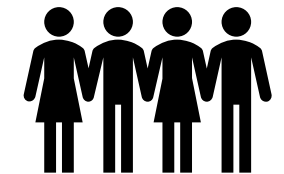




Leaving Care



- ✓ Further develop effective partnerships with housing providers across the borough, creating a joint Care Leaver strategy for the provision of cost effective, safe and good quality housing
- ✓ Improve the range of supported accommodation options for care experienced young people
- ✓ Support and encourage young people to remain in their placements to at least 17 ½ or until they are ready to move on; for some Staying Put. A small cohort will require earlier transition planning to accommodation appropriate to their individual needs.
- ✓ Ensure transition planning for children with complex needs commences at 16y or before; involving partnership working with adults' services
- ✓ With our commissioning service undertake market warming, seeking opportunities to support young people access private let homes; recognising that social housing is limited at this time.



Demand data (some key headings)

- CLA rates per 10'000 has increased over 5y (2018-2022); Eng 64 to 70, SE 51 to 56 – 9% - Slough now in-line with SN's – increase in UASC (43 in 2022/23)
- 6% (167) National increase in children's homes; smaller increase than previous 2 years (1% in real terms – 5% increase in previous years) – currently 55 CLA from other LA's placed in Slough
- 26% of children looked after are placed more than 20 miles from the borough (reduction of 6% on previous year but higher than Eng, SN ave.)
- 68% CLA because of abuse and neglect – 55% aged between 11 & 17y
- 16% CLA due to absent parenting – 16 to 17y (2022/23 – 7% rise on prev. yr)
- 40% (85 (38 UASC)) of all CLA are teenagers (16 & 17y) – 2/3 male
- For over 5y children aged below 1y is 1/3 higher than Eng, SE, SN

Demand data (some key headings)

- Of children exiting care, 2023 saw the lowest number of children returning home at 15% (55% in 2020, 38% in 2022)
- 60% of CLA population male – increasing from ages 5-10y, and 11-15y
- 64% of Slough’s communities from ethnic minorities; CLA population broadly similar
- 16% (41) of CLA and 14% (23) of CEYP have a diagnosed medical need or disability (e.g. Autism/Aspergers)
- 10% (25) of CLA and 14% (13) of CEYP have a Neuro Divergent need (e.g autism spectrum disorder/ADHD)
- No. of Children entering care and cumulative net change has increased over recent years; however, number of episodes of children entering care has increased and ‘individual’ entries into care are slightly lower – indicating repeat episodes of care.

Demand data (some key headings)

- Children exiting care, after 1-2y and 2y+ has increased over recent years, 5% and 10% respectively (5y trend)
- 64% (164) CLA live with foster carers; 9.5% of which are connected carers, 17% internal IFA, 38% external IFA, with an increasing demand (March 23)
- Of the above, 15% - 5-10y, 19% - 11-15y and 16% - 16-17y
- 6% (15) live in children's residential homes (March 23) – between 2021 and 2023 there was a decrease however this is increasing (21 in Sept 23)
- 8.4% of children have had 3 or more placement moves, slightly lower than comparator groups; however, long term placement stability is at least 7% lower than comparators
- Significant increase in demand for semi-independent provision – 43 in 2021 to 74 in 2023

Next steps

Governance

Corporate Parenting Panel

SCF Board

Executive; Getting to Good Board

Sufficiency Project Board - engine room

Practice

Work streams & Project Leads

- Edge of Care
(Head of Service; Safeguarding & Family Support)
- Commissioning
(Head of Service; Commissioning Lead)
- Fostering Recruitment & Retention
(Head of Service; Regulated Services)
- Achieving Permanence
(Head of Service; Sufficiency & Permanency)
- Leaving Care
(HoS; Children Looked After & Support Service)



Any questions...





Voluntary Adoption Agency Report April 2022 – March 2023

Report Summary

This report outlines the progress made by Slough Children First's Voluntary Adoption Agency.

Report Author Susan Chapman,
Service Manager, Adoption

Date: April 2023

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Observatory House, Windsor Road, Slough, SL1 2EL



A hands-on approach to help children in Slough be
..... Safe, Secure and Successful

1 Introduction and service overview

- a. This report details the performance of Slough Voluntary Adoption Agency in line with the National Minimal Standards for adoption and Statutory Guidance looking at activity from 1st April 2022 until 31st March 2023 and focusses on plans for development for 2023-2024.
- b. As an adoption agency we are required to comply with a comprehensive range of legislation, statutory guidance and national minimal standards and are subject to inspection by OFSTED.
- c. Slough Voluntary Adoption Agency continues to sit within Coram Ambitious for Adoption Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) since joining on 1st April 2021 and delivers adoption services for Slough Children First (SCF).
- d. Our range of activity is captured within our Statement of Purpose which is reviewed annually, is published on our website and should be read alongside this report.
- e. The VAA SCIEF inspection took place between 21st February and 25th February 2023. Whilst we are awaiting the draft report the general feedback from the inspection was positive.

2 Summary of Progress

The Adoption Service has established and delivered the following services during the last year to meet the needs of children within Slough:

- Worked closely with the 8 partner Local Authorities within the Coram Ambitious for Adoption RAA to develop standard working practices in family finding and post adoption support to support best outcomes for children and families
- Accessed therapeutic services for a number of families via the Adoption Support Fund (ASF), making 23 successful applications.
- Family finding social workers have identified families for a 7 Slough Children where their permanency plan is one of adoption.
- Slough post adoption social workers and service manager have been very proactive in developing the post adoption work stream to develop a standard post adoption offer within the RAA.
- Matched children both internally within the RAA and with external providers when there have been no suitable identified Coram adopters.
- Have utilised a dedicated 'Step Up' Family finding service offered within the RAA through national grant funding to provide intensive family finding for priority children.
- Have utilised the Early Permanence Team within the RAA to make 4 referrals for EP placements.
- Delivered a training programme for adopters with Slough children placed, living in Slough or within the wider RAA.
- Reviewed and developed, events and the training and development calendar for our adopter community.
- Updated Slough Children First adoption policies and guidance
- Promoted Equality and Diversity
- Our Muslim adopters have access to Muslim adopters' support group organised by the RAA.
- The Slough Adoption Team have had access to a rich and varied learning and development programme through the RAA.
- Our adoption support social workers in addition have had access to group reflective supervision once a month facilitated by the Coram RAA.
- A dedicated Life Story Worker, located within SCF who completes life story books for children with plan for adoption, will return to sit within the VAA in April 2023.

- Held a successful picnic event in July 2022
- Developed a non ASF funded 12-week parenting programme to support all adoptive families with a Slough child placed.
- Have offered direct support to 8 birth relatives to facilitate contact with adopted children, including support to write letters for letterbox contact and supporting a mother whose son is turning 18.
- Have re-engaged 8 adoptive families to re-commence indirect contact with birth families.
- Have provided Theraplay support delivered by a skilled adoption support worker within the service.
- One of our adoption support social workers have undertaken 8 MIMS assessments with adoptive families.

3 Changes in the Adoption Service

- a) Since the last annual report there has been a change in management of the Adoption Service. This change occurred in January 2023 with the departure of the previous manager, Raheela Khan who left on 13.01/2023 and the appointment of the new manager, Susan Chapman who took over as manager on 16.01.2023 and who previously occupied a senior social worker role within the service. At the time of writing this report the process of registering as the VAA Registered Manager is in process.
- b) Further appointments have been made for two vacant part time Senior Social Worker posts. One Post Adoption Social Worker post was filled in February 2023 and the second role for a joint family finder and post adoption social worker is due to start in April 2023.

4 Promoting Equality and Diversity

The Adoption Service wholeheartedly supports the principle of equality of opportunity and opposes all forms of discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, medical condition (including people living with HIV or AIDS), disability and age. It is in both the service's best interest and those who work with the service to ensure that the attributes, talents and skills available throughout the community are recognised and utilised in the interests of children in care. To this end, the over-riding principle is that the adopters recruited and approved by Coram Adoption are those best able to provide a stable and safe permanent home for children needing adoption.

5 Ofsted Inspection

- a. The adoption services was inspected as a Voluntary Adoption Agency in February 2023. At the time of writing this report the official judgement and report has not yet been published.
- b. The adoption service was also focused on during Slough Children First's Ofsted inspection where positive feedback was received in regards to the quality of family finding and adoption support the service offers to children and families where a Slough child has been placed.

6 Performance Summary 1st April 2022– 31st March 2023

6.1 Child placements

- a. Since April 2022 – March 23, 7 children have been placed for adoption, including 3 children placed in Early Permanence placements under fostering regulations.
- b. 3 children have been placed with Adopters from Coram Ambitious for Adoption Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) and 4 children have been placed with adopters from other adoption agencies. The age profile of the children at date of placement is between the ages of 10 weeks and 7 years and 6 months. 1 child is 7 plus, 1 child is 4 plus, 2 children are 1 plus, 1 child is 5 months and 1 child is 10 weeks.
- c. It is envisaged that the Slough children will continue to benefit from the matching activity within the RAA during the coming months. We have plans for a further match with RAA approved adopters at panel in May, a potential EP placement is being explored for another child and 1 RAA family will be visited following the Placement Order being granted for another child.
- d. The total number of ADM decisions during this period is 10. Out of these 10 children 1 child is placed in an adoption placement, 2 are placed in an EP placement, 2 children are still waiting for placement orders to be granted. The ages of children waiting for placement orders are between 1 and 5 years old.
- e. The reported number of placement orders for the last year is 7. The profile of the children with a placement order are predominately White and between the ages of 1 year and 5 years.
- f. The plan has changed from adoption for 2 children to an alternative plan. For 1 child the plan changed to long-term fostering in recognition of her ongoing family involvement and her father's commitment to change his circumstances in order to care for her in the future. For 1 child the plan changed to an SGO placement with a family member.
- g. As of 31 March 2023, 6 children were waiting with a Placement Order for an adoptive family. Out of these 6 children we have identified families for 2 children. 1 child is going to matching panel in May, and 1 child will go to matching panel once a pending health assessment has been completed. 1 child has a family identified and a family finding visit will be taking place in April 2023. 1 child has complex needs and active family finding is

taking place and for the remaining 3 children, they are a sibling group of 2 and a number of families are currently being considered. The profile of children waiting to be matched are aged between 1 and 5 years.

- h. Adoption Orders were granted for 18 children during the last year.
- i. During the last year 2 EP placements were made. A further 2 referrals have been made to Coram and other agencies for early permanence placements. 1 of these referrals were for a sibling group of 2. A decision was made after further consideration that an EP placement would not be appropriate for these siblings at that time. The second referral was made in March 23 and at the time of writing is still in the process of consideration between professionals.

6.2 Adopter Sufficiency

- j. Slough Children First no longer recruit or assess prospective adopters, having joined the RAA in April 2021. Through contract, Coram Adoption recruit, assess, prepare and train adopters and early permanence carers to provide loving and secure families to children requiring adoption from Slough.
- k. The agreed contractual arrangements 2023/2024 between Slough and Coram Adoption for child adoption placements is the same as the previous year with 9 placements.
- l. Coram Adoption draw upon enquires from across the wider London Region, Slough and neighbouring Home Counties. Any prospective adopter living in Slough will be signposted to Coram Adoption to make enquires about becoming an approved adopter.
- m. Information events are being held virtually on average twice a month. These online events remain popular and will continue to be held throughout 2023/2024. Whilst subject to regular review, there are no immediate plans to start face to face information events as the current arrangements are working well.
- n. The task to recruit more applicants from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds is long term, with the focus on building trust and confidence and finding ways to work through barriers that might prevent applicants coming forward. Coram have taken a proactive approach by recruiting an Ambassador to work closely on recruiting more adopters from Black, Asian and ethnic backgrounds.

7. Early Permanence Quality Mark

- a. In March 2023 the RAA as a whole, was awarded the Early Permanence Quality Mark. This standard of excellence is awarded to adoption agencies that demonstrate the quality of their service and commitment to delivering early permanence for children where adoption is in their best interest.
- b. Early Permanence is by its nature complex work and may not result in a placement but always contributes to child focused planning.
- c. Early Permanence is actively promoted across the RAA. Regular training and support opportunities are offered to all RAA partners from the EP lead and team, this includes lunch and learn workshops for SCF social workers, IRO's and team managers.

- d. To contribute to the promotion of Early Permanence, the service manager has started to attend pre proceeding tracking meeting's alongside the care proceeding tracking meetings and can therefore ensure that EP is considered for all children within court proceedings with a recognition that this will not always be appropriate.

8. Adoption Support

- a. The post adoption service provides a range of services for adopters who have been matched with a Slough child and any adopters living in the area post 3 years of their adoption order being granted and any adopters living within Slough. From April 2022 to March 2023 the post adoption service has responded to 80 requests for support on a variety of subjects.
- b. Some of these enquiries resulted in the completion of an assessment of need, ongoing support from our adoption support social workers, ASF applications for ongoing therapeutic packages. In some cases, the families were signposted to other areas or agencies or offered a short-term service from the team, for example writing Later Life Letters, sorting out finances, tracking medical information, supporting contact with siblings as well as letter box contact and sharing sensitive information with adopters about birth family as well as ASF enquiries and processing invoices.
- c. As of March 2023, the post adoption service was working with 30 children (24 families). 19 children are receiving various services via the ASF funds such as Dyadic Developmental Psychology (DDP), play therapy and therapeutic life story work as well as therapeutic parenting.
- d. Further to the support via the adoption support fund the post adoption service is fortunate to have a dedicated social worker who is also trained in Theraplay. She has worked with a number of children and the adopter's both pre and post adoption. As of March 2023, this social worker has undertaken 8 Adult Attachment Style Interviews, 8 MIMS assessments and offered Theraplay to 5 families. The work of the Theraplay worker has been appreciated by the adopters and has been complimented by the independent reviewing officers, and the adopters' supervising social workers.
- e. The post adoption team have developed a non ASF funded 12 week support programme for supporting early placements. This programme has benefitted 5 families in the last 12 months and helped to stabilise 1 placement that came close to breaking down.
- f. The post adoption service contributes to the annual financial reviews of the adoption allowances.
- g. The post adoption service runs well attended social gatherings (e.g. picnics) for adopters and their children. At the last summer picnic children enjoyed using a wide range of indoor and outdoor equipment and we received positive feedback from adopters and their children about how they have appreciated the opportunity to meet with other adoptive families and gain advice from the post adoption service.
- h. The training and development of adopters is a high priority for the service. The post adoption service also provides a significant amount of training for adopters. A training programme has been delivered over the last two years and will be reviewed this year to build on the already successful content. Training opportunities are circulated to the adopters within Slough and adopters approved by Slough as well as to the adopters of the partner local authorities within the RAA. The service plans to continue to develop a

more focused and 'needs led training programme' to target the developmental needs of adopters.

- i. Three newsletters have been produced in the last year and sent out to all adopters approved by the Agency, adopters with Slough children placed with them, and adoptive families who have moved into the area post 3 years Adoption Order. This keeps adopters informed about up and coming training and social events as well as providing them with informative articles regarding adoption.
- j. Post Adoption social workers within the RAA have access to group reflective supervision once a month.
- k. Our Muslim adopters have access to Muslim adopters support group organised by RAA.

7. Birth Records Counselling

a. The post adoption team is responsible for providing an adoption service to adult adoptees living in the area, providing advice and counselling about their adoptions, together with any information that is available from adoption records.

b. Where a birth parent or sibling of an adopted adult is wishing to establish contact with his/her birth child/sibling, he/she will be offered a counselling interview.

c. Between April 2022 and March 2023 there have been 3 adult adoptees living in the area wanting to access their records/establish contact with birth family for whom we have provided a service or provided advice. There have also been 8 birth parents/family and a sibling of an adopted adult wishing to establish contact with his/her birth child/sibling, who we have provided a service for.

8. Letter Box Service

a. The letter box service is managed by a senior post adoption social worker and supported by an administrator letter box coordinator.

b. The service includes:

- Management of the letter box service, including relevant administrative and professional tasks as required.
- Management of the support offered and provided to birth family members when the plan for the child is adoption.
- Management of post adoption direct contact arrangements between adoptive families and birth families where there is no statutory local authority involvement. Support has included direct work with birth family to write letters when birth relatives find this difficult.

- In March 2023, 1 birth mother was supported to meet with the adoptive parent via a video call with an agreed plan for future ongoing direct contact to take place between birth and adoptive mother.
- The adoption team has 152 open cases for letter box contact and the letter box coordinator is facilitating letter box contact for 138 families.

9. Coffee Mornings/Picnics

- a. Coffee mornings have in the past enabled our adopters and their children (under 5's) to meet with other adopters and to socialise with other adopted children. An impact of the Covid pandemic was that coffee mornings moved to virtual events which were poorly attended and consequently the decision was made to pause these events.
- b. The team have considered resuming these face-to-face events and considered the need for sourcing and financing of venues and potential location issues since many of our adopters are living outside of the Slough area.
- c. There is no doubt of the benefit of such events as they provide opportunities for adopters to support each other and for the adoption team to inform and consult with adopters for the purpose of service development and therefore we will need to think creatively as to how to facilitate events that can be accessed by families with Slough children.
- d. The team held another successful picnic event in July 2022 which was enjoyed by all who attended, although it was not as well attended as previous picnic events which may have been due to a number of reasons. Planning will begin in April for this year's summer picnic.

10. Wellbeing Service

The Agency has access to a play therapist and clinicians who offer therapeutic support to our adopters, carers and children within Slough Children First. The adoption service also has access to its own Theraplay worker.

11. Management of Adoption Agency Work

- a. The day-to-day management of the work of the Adoption Agency is undertaken by the Adoption Service Manager in consultation with the Coram Ambitious for Adoption Managing Director and the Responsible Individual for the Adoption Agency. The responsibility for adoption decisions rests with the Head of Service for Regulatory Services for Slough Childrens First
- b. The role of Adoption Support Services Advisor (ASSA) is vested in the Service Manager for Adoption Support, with delegated day to day activities undertaken by the post adoption workers within the Adoption Team located in Slough. Strategic issues that need to be addressed at senior management level are raised by the ASSA to the RAA Managing Director.

- c. Board Members receive regular information on the management and outcomes of the service in order to inform them in carrying out their responsibilities as Corporate Parents.

12. Inter-country Adoption

The Agency, by arrangement with IAC Centre for Adoption, delegates to that Agency the work of providing assessments, counselling and services to applicants wishing to adopt from abroad. Any requests received by the adoption service for Inter-country adoption are responded to via our duty system and advice is provided and enquirers are directed to the IAC Centre for Adoption.

13. Adoption Panel and Decision Making

- a. Coram Ambitious for Adoption RAA holds adoption and permanency panel 3 times a month. The composition of the panel is in line with regulations. Additional panels can be arranged if needed. The role of the panel is to consider adopter approvals, matches, and if adoption is the best plan for a child that has been relinquished for adoption.
- b. The overall functioning of the adoption panel is managed by Coram Ambitious for Adoption panel adviser, including maintaining the central list of panel members and ensuring that annual reviews of panel members and training requirements are maintained in accordance with regulations.
- c. The Managing Director for Coram Ambitious for Adoption undertakes the role of the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for the approval of adopters who will consider recommendations from Panel.
- d. A decision as to whether a child who is the subject of care proceedings should be placed for adoption is made by the ADM at Slough Children First. The ADM is able to consult with the agency's legal, medical and adoption advisors and requests any further information which is deemed necessary for making ADM decisions.
- e. The ADM at Slough Children First also undertakes the role of ADM for the matching of the children with the adopters and considers the recommendation from the panel.

14. Non-agency Adoptions

Slough Children First provides a service to people applying for a non-agency adoption (adoption not arranged through the VAA). Initial meetings and subsequent assessments are undertaken by experienced staff and reports are provided to the Court within set timescales. Adopters are made aware of their right to access adoption support services. The prospective adopters are also made aware of alternatives available to them via written information and during the meeting with the social worker.

15. Life Story Work

Slough Children First has a dedicated Life Story Worker who has produced excellent life story books for children. The Life Story Worker is currently working on 13 books in conjunction with adopters and social workers. The work of the Life Story Work was commended during the recent VAA Ofsted Inspection and from this it was recognised that the work undertaken by the worker would be best placed back within the Adoption Service and as such the Life Story

Worker will return to the adoption service from April 2023 with oversight and management provided by the Adoption Service Manager.

16. Disruptions

There were no disruptions of adoptive placements for our children during the last year.

17. Complaints/Allegations

The Adoption Service Manager dealt with 1 complaint in the last year. This complaint centred around a decision to stop payments for an enhanced adoption allowance prior to a review of the allowance.

There have been two allegations that have led to section 47 investigations since April 2022. These concluded with no further action by Slough Children First with the families continuing to be supported by their post adoption social workers.

18. Financial Report

The Adoption Agency budget was £646k for the contract sum, with a further £864k for adoption allowances and interagency fees, a total budget of £1,510k. There has been a £78k overspend in the last year from adoption allowances paid following an adoption placement. A number of adoptive placements have attracted enhanced financial support due to the complex needs of the children. There is a further small overspend of £4k against interagency fees where Coram RAA have not been able to find matching adopters and the organisation has had to look to external agencies for placements.

19. Coram Ambitious for Adoption RAA Key Objectives 2023/2024

- Sufficiency of adopters to meet contracted placement targets including early permanence carers.
- Recruitment of more adopters from a Black and Minority Ethnic background.
- Completion of the Coram RAA review including recommendations for next 5 year delivery
- Implementation of the agreed best practice family finding models to achieve consistency across the RAA for the selection, linking and matching of prospective adopters to RAA children.
- Development and introductions of the Beth Neil UEA approach to transitions for children moving to adoptive placements.
- Improve commissioning arrangements for the provision of therapeutic support through the Adoption Support Fund

19.b Slough Adoption Team Objectives 2023/2024

- Review of contact arrangements to develop support offered to birth relatives and to consider direct contact arrangements post adoption.
- Review and development of our post adoption training programme offered to all adopters of Slough children and to also include Slough Foster carers.
- Strengthening safeguarding, quality assurance and regulatory compliance.

- Strengthening the knowledge of Early Permanence of SCF staff through the support of the Coram RAA EP lead.
- Contribution of the adoption team to training focused on developing the skills of SCF social workers in writing CPRs.

Susan Chapman

Service Manager for Slough

Coram Ambitious for Adoption RAA

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**Corporate Parenting Panel
Annual Reporting Schedule/Themed Topics**

CPP Dates	CPP reporting Schedule / Themed topics	CLA & CEYP Participation events	Full Council dates (municipal year 2023/24)
21 September 2023	Next Steps & Forward Plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate Parenting Action Plan • Reporting Schedule/Participation Themes Annual Fostering Report	24 – 28 October 2023; National Care Leavers Week October half term - Practice week (staff learning opportunities)	
26 th October 2023 (1 off event) CPP Workshop with LGA	LGA CPP Workshop: CPP Vision, Aims and Best Practice		
21 st November 2023	Sufficiency Strategy Local Offer for CEYP Annual Adoption report		30 th November 2023
16 th January 2024	Regulation 45 report (Breakaway - short breaks provision) Quarterly fostering report CP Strategy Virtual School – Education report (Key Stage results)	CPP to consider proposed 'You said, We did, So what' approach to hearing and acting of CLA/CEYP priorities (CPAP)	25 th January 2023
4 th April 2024	Annual Complaints report		25 th April 2023
End of May 2024 – date tbc	Annual Children in Care report Quarterly fostering report	15 – 28 May 2024; National Foster Carer Fortnight May half-term – CLA celebration event and awards	
End July 2024 – date tbc	Annual CEYP report Regulation 45 report (Breakaway - short breaks provision)	August 2024; Have Your Say Day (CLA/CEYP fun day event and consultation)	

September 2024 – date tbc	Quarterly fostering report Quality Assurance and Reviewing Service annual report		
November 2024 – date tbc	Virtual School – Education report (Key Stage results)	November 2024; Take Over Day (CLA/CEYP – Take Over SCF/SBC Services) 19/11/23 – Annual Foster Carer Celebration Event	
January 2025	Annual Adoption Report		

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**MEMBERS' ATTENDANCE RECORD 2023/2024
COPORATE PARENTING PANEL**

COUNCILLOR	18/07/23	21/09/23	26/10/23 Workshop	21/11/23	16/01/24	04/04/24
Dauti	P	P	P			
Gill	P	P	Ap			
Hulme	P	P	P			
Rana	Ab	P	P			
Tomar		P	Ap			
Qaseem	P	P	P			

P = Present for whole meeting
Ap = Apologies given

P* = Present for part of meeting
Ab = Absent, no apologies

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