

## Practice and improvement fund early placement project

### Output 1: Findings from the survey of local authorities undertaken in August & September 2016

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# VERSION CONTROL

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## 1. Introduction

This survey was undertaken with local authorities and formed part of consultations on early permanence funded by the DfE's Practice Improvement Fund and the Early Permanence Expert Working Group.

The ultimate aim of the project is to improve the outcomes for looked after children by driving improvements in the way they are matched and placed and to identify areas of excellent practice in early permanence.

Additional consultations designed to inform Early Permanence practice have included:

- Feedback from discussions in the concurrent planning subscription network group hosted by Coram Adoption; and
- A series of telephone interviews conducted by members of the expert steering group with key contacts in local authorities.

The findings presented in this report represent the raw data from the survey, simply the responses provided. The purpose at this stage is to inform the discussions on the further development of the project outputs, in particular the development of the Quality Mark.

## 2. Survey responses

Out of the 353 local authorities (all the ones in England) who were targeted to receive the survey, only 8 surveys were returned. This was despite the survey being sent out several times and despite the deadline for the survey being extended several times too. The authorities and agencies responding included:

- Coram Cambridgeshire Adoption (CCA) / Cambridgeshire County Council
- Wolverhampton
- Gloucestershire County Council
- Nottingham City Council
- Derbyshire County Council
- Lincolnshire County Council
- Northamptonshire County Council
- Rutland County Council

The survey response was affected by changes made by DfE in relation to who was responsible for distributing the survey. After several changes, Coram's impact and evaluation team took on this role. The purpose of the survey was not to identify particular practices in specific local authorities but to try to identify examples of best practice and what works well within any local authority. The results in this report are therefore anonymised with practice in particular authorities not identified but broader practice and approaches drawn out.

## 3. Survey findings

### 3.1. *About the authorities*

Of the 8 authorities who responded, one was a metropolitan area, one was a unitary authority, one was an adoption agency and five were county councils. The total number of looked after children (excluding unaccompanied asylum seekers) being looked after by the authorities (at 31 March 2016) was 4,750, with numbers ranging from 39 to 904 by the different authorities.

The number of children placed under Regulation 25A between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016 was 45. The number of children placed with dually approved families (Fostering for Adoption/ Concurrent Planning between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016) was 57. The number of relinquished babies placed between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016 was 12. The number of SGOs granted between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016 was 267.

### 3.2. *Early permanence planning*

Authorities were asked about the systems and processes that they use to plan before children are 'looked after', prior to proceedings, and during the Public Law Outline (PLO) process. Authorities were asked about these for the following categories in terms of the frequency with which they used the following

**Table 1: Local authority usage of systems and processes for permanence planning**

System used and frequency of use	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Permanency Planning Meetings/equivalent for unborn children	3	4	1	0	0
Permanency Planning Meetings/equivalent prior to proceedings	5	1	2	0	0
Review of alternative possible care plans during interventions that support parents prior to proceedings	5	1	2	0	0
Assessing the wider family prior to proceedings	2	4	2	0	0
Family Group Conferences prior to proceedings	0	4	3	1	0

Clearly most of the authorities responding made use of the above systems always or most of the time.

When asked about other systems that their local authority used, several respondents gave very detailed responses, as follows:

- Head of Family Finding tracking of all post court memos for children subject to legal proceedings and minutes of resource panel for threshold for public law outline (PLO) and accommodation. Permanence Monitoring Group held monthly chaired by Safeguarding and Standards and attended by CCA head of family finding, childcare group managers, kinship manager, permanent fostering manager and most recently legal representative. The meeting tracks all children new to lac or legal proceedings, and the progress of care plans.

The meeting also shares and tracks information on unborn babies for early permanence. The meeting can highlight practice difficulties and be the focus of shared problem solving. In one agency Family finders are structured along a unit model and all cases for early permanence and family finding are tracked within weekly unit meetings. Two Permanence Units with a remit to fast track care proceedings for children under 2 and unborn children with a plan or likely plan for early permanence or adoption. LA has a system in place to facilitate early referrals from health and midwives from 13 weeks and early CP conferences timetabling has for unborn children enabling potential for multi-agency review scheduled prior to birth.

- Monthly tracking meetings with senior management and representatives from all relevant teams.
- Monthly Legal Planning with CAFCASS Plus meeting. We also have a “Safeguarding Babies at Birth” protocol which addresses early permanency planning and avoiding delay. This protocol includes formal birth protection planning meetings and demands early consideration of realistic secure options for care.
- Weekly Legal Planning meeting and Stage 1 PLO. Use of CAFCASS process. A monthly Permanency Panel ensures we have effective early planning for permanency and alternative realistic plans for legally secure arrangements.
- Weekly Edge of Care Panels are held with access to Multi Systemic Therapy and Multi Systemic Therapy for Child Abuse and Neglect. Also active child protection planning focusses on early exploration of family alternatives for care.
- Wider family assessments commence in child protection process, but extended family may have late presentation in proceedings delaying some assessments. Currently training and launching a new Family Group Conference Team delivered by two training individuals which is limited capacity.
- Early referral to Family Finding.
- CAFCASS plus is used for all children of parents who have had children previously removed so that a pre-birth assessment is completed prior to the child’s birth and a GAL is appointed so that there is already an independent view prior to the child being born. This enables early planning.
- We use Stage 1 panel/legal meetings to track cases and assess potential care plans prior to proceedings.

### *3.3. Tracking and Team Meetings*

When asked if their local authority has a system of regular management tracking meetings to review cases in proceedings and identify drift/delay for children under age

10, all eight authorities said that they did. Comments provided in response to this question included the following:

- Permanence Planning Meetings are held every 6 weeks for children in proceedings or with a parallel plan for adoption. Meetings convened / chaired by Adoption family finders. All meetings involve foster carers, children social workers, fostering social workers and other relevant professionals.
- A monthly tracking report is overseen by Service Management meetings with Head of Field work, during Service Managers Team Meetings with first line managers and 1-1 meetings. Head of Service oversight of tracking report and they also chair the Local Family Justice Board Performance Sub Group. We have also created a “Local Family Justice Board potential drift referral” to go to courts for cases at risk of delay/blocks.
- Monthly meetings between legal services, reviewing and child adoption team track cases and plan dates for ADM decisions to integrate with PLO timescales. All cases which are likely to go into proceedings go to the 'support panel ' where a group of senior managers from across the service make decisions about care proceedings and ensure that all other support and early help have been considered before care proceedings are filed. In addition there are legal planning meetings to consider threshold and again these are attended by representatives from across the service.

In terms of responsibility for supervising the tracking process, three authorities stated that the Service Manager has responsible for this, and in one authority the Assistant Director is responsible. In another this was undertaken by a Social Work Unit Manager, others by both the Head of Service and the Service Manager and in by the Head of Service alone.

In term of the effectiveness of the tracking meetings in supporting early permanence for children under 10, three authorities responded that they rated this as very good in their authority, two as good, three as neither good nor poor.

With regard to what works in relation to tracking in each authority, respondents were asked about what works well and what could be improved. Their responses included:

- the tracking meetings are only one part of the process and information and updates are collectively provided by the relevant areas of the service. We recently identified some children with later identification as they were subject to care proceeding but were not the subject of legal orders and remained in the family home. These cases were not easily identified from LAC data and the tracking meetings have been widened to include legal representative to identify all cases within the court arena. The Permanence Monitoring Meeting tracks all children waiting with PO made each month. These children are also tracked in weekly family finding unit meetings.

- 100% of children who had a placement order granted in 2015-2016 were linked within timescales. A 'Head Of Service Oversight Panel' (HSOP) is held weekly and LAC cases/ cases in proceedings are tracked. All cases can be reviewed to ensure they are on track overseen regularly by a Programme Manager.
- The process is much improved with our Adoption Lead tracking permanency, and Head of Service tracking proceedings, but we are overcoming some historical delay, and managing turnover in staffing that has had an impact., Face to face regular meetings help unblock barriers and progress work. Improvements would be supported by more capacity, and reduction in agency social workers. We have a programme in place to address these factors.
- The system enables us to identify siblings pre-birth so that they can potentially be placed using Fostering for Adoption with their older adopted sibling at the earliest opportunity. We could develop better pre-birth planning systems and frameworks for collating the relevant information that prospective adopters need to enable them to make decisions.
- What works well is a dedicated person who actively manages the tracking spread sheet.
- Tracking of under 10's; tracking of cases in proceedings. Tracking could be tighter and more rigorous.

Frequency of tracking meetings was weekly for one authority and monthly for seven of them. The cases covered in meetings were for all children waiting cases in all authorities except one, where their meeting reviewed all children waiting cases but in turn across several meetings.

LAs were given the opportunity to explain their criteria for coverage of cases in their tracking meetings and their responses included:

- All cases in Child in Need/Child Protection where there are initiating court proceedings are tracked by a Court Liaison Officer. All cases open to the Adoption Service are tracked by the Adoption team also.
- Children requiring permanence.
- All children with a potential plan of adoption.

Agencies were asked who chairs the meeting, and responded as follows: one was chaired by an Assistant Director; two were chaired by Service Managers; one by the Head of Service Locality; one by the Service Manager and Head of service; one by the Social Work Unit Manager; one by the Head of Service Fieldwork and Adoption Service Manager; and one by a Senior Lawyer from the authority.

The issue of attendance at meetings of the referral and assessment team was also raised. Two of authorities answered that the referral and assessment team attended all the meetings; one that they attended more than half of the meetings; one that they attended fewer than half of the meetings; and four that they attended no meetings. When asked if the attendance of the referral and assessment team at meetings was triggered by specific criteria, the authorities replied as follows:

- Not included as they do not hold any cases beyond completion of children's assessment/ICPC.
- Staff from the Recruitment and Assessment teams regularly sit on the 'support panel' which considers all cases prior to them going into proceedings.
- We do not have an R&A team.

The issue of attendance at meetings of the Children in Need team was also raised. Four of authorities answered that the referral and assessment team attended all the meetings; one that they attended more than half of the meetings; one that they attended about half of the meetings; and two that they attended no meetings.

When asked if the attendance of the Children in Need team at meetings was triggered by specific criteria, the authorities replied as follows:

- A Children in Need Group manager will be invited to attend all tracking meetings and to provide an update on cases whether attending or not.
- Children in Need casework in Fieldwork and all details provided of tracking include oversight of CIN at Edge of Care through to Permanency/Pathway.
- the case holder.
- Staff from the Children in Need teams regularly attend the 'support panel ' where decisions about care proceedings are made.

The issue of attendance at meetings of the LAC team was also raised. Five of authorities answered that the Children in Need team attended all the meetings; one that they attended about half of the meetings; and two that they attended no meetings.

When asked if the attendance of the LAC team at meetings was triggered by specific criteria, the authorities replied as follows:

- Service Manager Adoption meets Children in Care Team Managers monthly to track all children with Best Interest Decision.
- Staff from the CLA teams are part of the group of team managers who meet to quality assure the Child Placement Reports prior to them going to the AD for agreement on the child's plan for adoption.



The issue of attendance at meetings of the adoption team was also raised. Six of authorities answered that the adoption team attended all the meetings; one that they attended more than half of the meetings; and one that they attended no meetings.

When asked if the attendance of the adoption team at meetings was triggered by specific criteria, the authorities replied as follows:

- The Adoption service track independently.
- Children with, or likely to have, an adoption plan.
- Adoption staff are involved in all tracking meetings for cases in care proceedings and are also involved in the quality assurance meetings prior to the AD decision.
- Adoption team/post order team and permanence team attend all tracking meetings.

The issue of attendance at meetings of the court team was also raised. All eight authorities stated that they attended no meetings. When asked if the attendance of the court team at meetings was triggered by specific criteria, the authorities replied as follows:

- Courts and CAFCASS are invited to CCA Steering Group Meetings and part of strategic meeting rather than planning meetings.
- Local Family Justice Board performance group tracks delay in proceedings - bi monthly.
- There are no representatives from the court.

The issue of attendance at meetings of the legal team was also raised. Three authorities answered that the legal team attended all the meetings; one that they attended fewer than half of the meetings; and four that they attended no meetings.

When asked if the attendance of the legal team at meetings was triggered by specific criteria, the authorities replied as follows:

- This is a new initiative going forward.
- Legal services representatives are involved in all legal planning meetings and are also represented on the 'support panel'. They also attend all tracking meetings of cases in proceedings alongside adoption and the independent reviewing service.
- Stage 1 and 2 panel are attended by legal because they look at pre-proceedings and cases in care proceedings.

The issue of attendance at meetings of the health team was also raised. Eight of the authorities answered that the health team attended no meetings.

When asked if the attendance of the health team at meetings was triggered by specific criteria, the authorities replied as follows:

- They are not involved.
- Health reports are always considered at the 'support panel ' where decisions are made regarding care proceedings.

The issue of attendance at meetings of other teams was also raised. Three authorities answered that other teams attended all the meetings; one that they attended more than half of the meetings; and four that they attended no meetings. When asked to identify the other teams that attended and if the attendance of other teams at meetings was triggered by specific criteria, the authorities replied as follows:

- Kinship team, permanent fostering team, adoption recruitment and assessment team (for feedback on pre-adoptive placements).
- Disability Team, IRO team manager, Agency advisor.
- Adoption Placement Advisors attend all tracking meetings CAFCASS - Monthly CAFCASS PLUS meetings take place.
- Safeguarding Team.

#### ***3.4. Legal Planning Meetings***

Local authorities were asked about the frequency of their legal planning meetings, and about the structure of these. They replied as follows:

- They are held routinely and must be held prior to the Threshold for Resources Panel that decides thresholds for PLO / legal proceedings and accommodation.
- A legal planning meeting i.e. a legal gateway meeting is undertaken, chaired by Senior Social Worker. Social worker attends, Social Work Unit Manager, Legal officer, LA, parents and their advocate.
- They are held at least twice for the child but at any other time when circumstances change. Chaired by the SW team manager and involve legal, adoption, Children in Care and other relevant professionals.
- Weekly - chaired by Service Manager. One meeting a month dedicated to unborn permanency (CAFCASS PLUS).
- When necessary dependent on children's plans.

- In all cases prior to proceedings being filed. The meetings involve representatives from all of the agencies working with the child and family and focus on whether or not the threshold is met for proceedings.
- Held 2 days a week, average 15 cases held per week. Chaired by a strategic manager and both legal and social workers and their managers attend.
- As needed. Numbers very small.

### ***3.5. Referral to the National Adoption Register***

Local authorities were asked about the frequency of their referrals to the National Adoption Register (NAR) within three months of the Placement Order being granted (in line with national requirements). Four of them replied that they always made referrals, and one replied that they never made referrals as their numbers are very small. Three replied that they made referrals most of the time. In addition, authorities commented on this question as follows:

- We are currently exploring use of the NAR adopter match as potential for a regional electronic system for family finding / linking and matching.
- If a child is classed as hard to place they will be placed on the NAR immediately a Placement Order has been granted, if a link has been identified the child will not be placed on the NAR. The recent difficulties with the setting up of Adoption Match have delayed us profiling children. We utilise Adoption Links and without this facility would not have linked as many children as we did in 2015-2016.
- Adoption Placement Advisor role tracks and refers all cases.
- We do not refer if there is an identified family.
- This is adopter led and some adopters chose not to go on the register.
- Always placed within 3 months.

### ***3.6. Identification of potential adoptive families by the time that the Placement Order is granted***

Local authorities were asked how often they already have a potential adoptive family identified by the time that the Placement Order is granted. One authority replied that it always did this. Five of them replied that they did this most of the time and one that it sometimes had a potential adoptive family lined up.

### ***3.7. Learning gained about early permanence from inspections and/or audits***

Local authorities were asked about learning they had gained about early permanence from inspections and/or audits. They replied as follows:

- Early permanence did not appear to focus as highly as we would have anticipated in our last inspection process and we had to actively draw inspectors' attention to the work being undertaken. We anticipate it will be more of a focus in future inspections.
- One authority has established processes to ensure cases are tracked, for example attendance at admission to care panel and the Heads of Service panel. The systems are reviewed to ensure they are suitable and effective.
- Communication is crucial early identification of potential placement Robust training for adopters is crucial Support for EP carers is imperative Decisions should be well documented practical advice re issues like contact.
- Critical always to track performance. It is also important to have sufficient capacity of Adopters, IRO's and Social Workers to drive plans. Use of CAF/CASS Plus informs our recruitment strategy to target adopters needed.
- The importance of early planning and tracking. Key role of IROs. Occasional need for challenge and escalation of decision-making. Need to get PO at same time as Care Order.
- Children benefit from being placed early and appear to form positive attachments to carers. That it is important to try to have as much health and heredity information as possible to enable the potential adopters to make a balanced decision.
- One authority has made very positive progress in early permanence work with the relationship with childcare and the judiciary seen as crucial to support early permanence work. Delays continue to happen and a lot of this is about the courts position which is often inconsistent depending on which judge sits.
- Needs to be someone's responsibility or danger of drift.

### ***3.8. Avoidable delays in local authority processes***

Local authorities were asked about avoidable delays in local authority processes. They responded as follows:

- Six authorities said that there was an avoidable delay at the stage of becoming looked after to recommendation to be placed for adoption.
- None responded that there were avoidable delays from recommendation to be placed for adoption and the ADM decision.

- Five authorities said that there was an avoidable delay at the stage of ADM to Placement Order.
- Three authorities said that there was an avoidable delay at the stage of Placement Order to proposed match.
- None responded that there were avoidable delays from proposed match to panel.
- None responded that there were avoidable delays from Panel to placement.

Local authorities were asked to comment further on the subject of avoidable delays in local authority processes. They commented as follows:

- We are seeing a decline in the timeliness of court proceedings with a return to sequential planning by the courts especially in regard to kinship assessments. This is delaying proceedings especially where adoption is the parallel plan for children. We are also seeing delay in proceedings where cases are timetabled to Interim Review Hearings and only timetabling to the final hearing at this stage. Court capacity can be problematic. Placement Order to proposed match can be impacted on by change as cases transfer between social work teams.
- Cases are progressed within 26 weeks; timescales can result in paperwork not being presented in a timely manner. Delay in adoption medicals paperwork can delay ADM decision recommendation for adoption can be approved and court cases are delayed regarding viability assessments which can present with delay in ADM to Placement Order .
- We have policy for Best Interest Decision by 2nd review (16 weeks), sometimes achieved early (particularly in CAFCASS PLUS.) The IRO notifies Head of Service of any delay. In ADM-PO Stage: Court delays in proceedings, but these are much improved. There is still some more work to do with the impact of Re: BS and late entry relatives in proceedings. We are also seeing a rise in mother and baby assessment orders from courts. 72 hour planning meeting starts permanence drive. Relinquished baby protocol in place to fast track these infants.
- One authority has very tight process whereby cases are picked up early either through reviews or through legal services. All cases are then twin tracked so that the ADM decision is swiftly followed by the PO application and the family finding starts prior to this so that adopters are identified and panel dates are booked in advance to ensure placement at the earliest opportunity.
- Becoming looked after to recommendation for adoption - this one due to delays in assessments/court demands and lack of effective family conferences. Impact of SGO's and courts wanting to avoid adoption all

costs in some cases. ADM to Placement Order – often court demands for further assessments late in the day.

### 3.9. Adoption team alerting to child requiring adoption

Local authorities were asked when the Adoption team is most often alerted to a child who may/does require adoption. They were asked to rank the stages from the most often (1) to the least often (7). The results are presented in the table below.

**Table 2: Stage at which Adoption team most often alerted in order of rank by LA**

Stage at which Adoption team most often alerted	Y	X	Z	W	A	B	C	D
Pre proceedings/when proceedings commence	1	1	4	1	3	1	3	3
When the Interim Care Order is made	7	3	4	1	2	7	6	1
After the first LAC review	2	3	4	7	1	1	4	4
After the second LAC review	5	3	3	1	4	7	7	6
After the Agency Decision Maker's (ADM) decision to apply for a Placement Order	6	2	1	1	5	n/a	4	6
When the Placement Order is made	n/a	n/a	6	1	6	n/a	7	6
After the Placement Order is made	n/a	n/a	7	1	7	n/a	7	6

Note – multiple responders gave the same rank to more than one response, scoring it on a range of 1-7 rather than ranking it.

Local authorities were asked to comment further on the subject of when adoption teams are alerted to a child requiring adoption. They responded as follows:

- The adoption team take responsibility for tracking with permanence planning meetings all children with a plan or parallel plan for adoption. We track cases where the outcome may be kinship or rehabilitation home to ensure that the LA's final care is a robust one and if the plan changes late in proceedings we have sufficient knowledge about the child to commence FF at that stage.
- Alerts now on pre-birth assessments. All end reviews include our Adoption Placement Advisors where adoption potential. Above is unclear as we alert early so Adoption Team know before PO etc.
- In authority B the adoption team has children's workers so all of the cases where adoption is a possibility are referred to the team for twin-tracking. All of the adoption CPR's are completed by workers in the adoption team so they are aware of the children for whom adoption may be the plan from the earliest stage.
- Permanence team co-workers and family finders are allocated at initial Preliminary Planning Meetings and adoption tracking spreadsheet is updated following cases being applicable from the admission list and unborn babies tracking' before the meetings have taken place.

### 3.10. Adoption team alerts relating to unborn children

When asked what percentage of these alerts related to unborn children the authorities responded as follows: 6%, 30%, 1%, 10%, and 15%.

### *3.11. Dual approval*

Local authorities were asked if they dually approve adopters as foster carers. Seven replied that they do, and one that they do not. When asked to comment on this the authorities responded as follows:

- 2 dual approvals during 2015-2016.
- Those who are in agreement and/or where there is a sibling to their adopted child.
- Yes – well established in one authority.

### *3.12. Concurrent planning*

Local authorities were asked if they use concurrent planning. Seven replied that they do, and one that they do not. When asked to comment on this the authorities responded as follows:

- Approved 2 during 2015-2016.
- We do not have a formal project.
- We could improve the number of fostering to adopt options to increase work in this area. Concurrent Planning has been impacted by RE: BS and courts have at times directed us not to commence adoption work pre final hearing.
- Fostering for adoption has replaced concurrent planning.
- In all cases.
- Approved first set of concurrent carers in Aug 16.

Respondents were also asked what they understood by concurrent planning. Responses were as follows:

- We understand that concurrent planning is a fostering placement (with dually approved and appropriately prepared/trained and supported carers) and is used where court proceedings and assessment of parents and /or kinship placements are on-going. The LA has not yet confirmed their final care plan. Whilst we seek an ADM decision for a care plan for a concurrency placement we would require a further best interest decision before a final care plan for adoption is agreed. We do not consider the placement to be a prospective adoptive placement until the match has been agreed by the ADM following a matching panel. We have also been pragmatic and use connected persons placements where we have needed to facilitate an early placement with older sibling



adopters who are not currently approved. We have also used fostering for adoption as part of our spectrum of early permanence when assessment is completed and the LA care plan is confirmed or for relinquished babies. We have used concurrency carers where we placed relinquished babies where there may be some outstanding uncertainties i.e. father unknown at this stage.

- Babies who are in the care system from a very young age are often moved from foster carer to adoptive carers while the courts reach a decision about who will care for the child in the long term.
- Placement of a child when the LA and the court have not ruled out reunification with birth family.
- Twin tracking all Adoption Plans (options) alongside assessment work to secure rehabilitation or extended family options.
- Placing a child with prospective adopters whilst confirming the permanence plan.
- Being able to plan for a possible adoption alongside further assessments of family members and significant others so as not to create any delay for the child and to provide the best outcome.
- This is where you place children often new-born and generally under 2 with dually approved carers where there is a parallel plan for adoption and rehabilitation. Case will be in proceedings and if rehabilitation is not possible the child will remain with the carers who will adopt them. This approach is slightly less certain than FFA where there is no plan from rehabilitation. Carers required specific training and support throughout the process but for the child it is much more beneficial particularly if they return to birth parents that can successfully parent them.
- Actively pursuing more than one permanency plan.

### ***3.13. Help to improve early permanence practice***

Authorities were asked what would help them to advance and improve their early permanence practice and given the following options:

- Support and resources for Concurrent Planning/Fostering for Adoption programmes; four authorities agreed that this would be helpful.
- Training on early permanence and the impact of delay; four authorities agreed that this would be helpful.
- Improved national guidance on early permanence; seven authorities agreed that this would be helpful.

Authorities were asked to say more about their answers and responded as follows:

- It is important that information and research is cascaded out about the impact of delay for children. The majority of the children we have placed for concurrency have had health and developmental uncertainties and would have been harder to place later in the process. We have seen the positive impact of concurrent carers providing attentive and attuned care for children who have experienced poor starts including extended stays in SCBU following birth.
- A concurrency policy is being finalised. Training has been provided to adoption, fostering and wider workforce permanency clinics are in place to discuss concurrent and foster for adoption cases.
- We have been working on these areas and have held recent briefings from Head of Service Fieldwork and a Senior Solicitor in relation to early permanence planning and changes in legal framework delivered to all staff.
- We have developed our own programme, but would benefit from additional materials to use.
- Training on early permanence and the impact of delay - this one in particular particularly for childcare teams.

In addition authorities were then offered an open response to explain what else might help them to advance and improve their early permanence practice. When asked to comment on this the authorities responded as follows:

- Considering how we can support the placement of children with older adoptive siblings who may not be approved adopters at the time. We have used connected persons and Reg 24 placements but further guidance on this would be helpful. It would be helpful to provide further clarification of support for concurrent and fostering for adoption placements should sit within adoption services with confirmation of a lighter touch on fostering regulations.
- We are in the process of developing a tracking system with LAC service to include children who were placed at home under parents regulations and have returned to the care of the LA who go on to have a care plan of adoption.
- Better planning in the early interventions regarding permanency. Clear guidance for professionals, panel, health etc.
- The following are things we are doing: A stable staff group in order to embed standards. Recent training and guidance needs to be regularly embedded as part of the induction of new staff. The development of Family Group Conferences will assist in improving our practice in this area.
- Maintaining experienced children's social workers with expertise in this field.

- We need to develop better methods of gathering good quality information pre-birth in order to promote early placement in more cases.
- Strengthen guidance and support for the judiciary to understand it better. The creation of a permanence team has supported the success of early permanence.

### ***3.14. Areas of excellent or innovative practice in early permanence***

Respondents were asked if there are any areas of excellent or innovative practice that is taking place in their local authority with regards to early permanence. They responded as follows:

- We are now working to develop an approach to early permanence across our RAA (7 LA's and 3 VAA's) that will enable us to harmonise processes and develop best practice across the whole of the region. We wish to ensure that all children have the opportunity of an early permanence placement where this is appropriate.
- We believe the attendance at the admission to care panel enables the Adoption service to monitor and track cases and progress them swiftly. We know about the children and their needs so can discuss with in house adopters/consortium members and explore matching prior to granting of placement order.
- Generally the use of EP in some circumstances where the outcome for the children has been so beneficial. Moving children straight from home to EP placement. Ongoing workshops presented to professionals about the importance and benefit of EP placements support groups for EP carers.
- The Adoption Analysis Journal is a performance report that tracks all children from Best Interest Decision. All children are tracked from Best Interest Decision to Adoption Order. Adoption Placement Advisors oversee all matches. We are members of an Adoption Consortium and work together with other LAs in relation to home finding collaboratively. Regular home finding meetings are arranged locally to generate interest in adopters with children who wait. Adoption Activity Days take place regularly with our partners. We invited a briefing last year from Coram/BAAF to all staff, Managers, IRO in relation to Fostering for Adoption and Concurrent Planning.
- We are strong at placing older children for adoption and can further look with you on Section 25a.
- The Cafcass plus scheme ensures that there is a clear procedure whereby all unborn children of families who have had children removed previously are referred at an early stage so that pre-birth assessments are completed at 20 weeks which means that by the time the baby is born there are clear decisions regarding the direction of the case and the planning needed. GAL's are appointed early so that their scrutiny and expertise is utilised in this process.

Fostering for adoption information is provided to all adoption applicants and is available on the website so that all applicants are aware of the scheme from the start and are provided with information.

- We place children under connected persons' arrangements i.e. a child with a birth sibling who was previously adopted to enable us to assess and approve the adopters as second time adopters and then we pursue it as an FFA placement following nominated officer's approval. This has enabled siblings to be placed together early on.