**SERVICE SPECIFICATION**

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| **Service:** | Specialist Adoption and Special Guardianship Support |
| **Commissioner Lead:** | Chris Martin Director for Integrated Commissioning and Vulnerable People |
| **Family Operations Lead:** | Sarah Carter Service Manager Family Placements Adoption |
| **Period:** | June 2016 – June 2018 (option to extend for 1 year) |

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| 1. **Introduction** |
| 1. **Improving outcomes for Adoptive and SGO families**    1. Essex County Council aims to improve the stability and resilience of adoptive families and those with Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) through the delivery of high quality specialist adoption and Special Guardianship Order support services that meet our families’ diverse needs. We intend to achieve this through moving away from current spot purchasing arrangements to commissioning a flexible framework of support that will ensure there is a range of appropriate services available to families and provide more certainty to the local market. The scope and requirements are set out in section 3.   **Essex County Council**   * 1. Essex County Council is one of the largest County Councils in England and is dedicated to improving Essex and the lives of our residents. Our ambition is for Essex to deliver the best quality of life in Britain. We will achieve this by providing high-quality, targeted services that deliver real value for money.   2. In February 2014 Essex County Council adopted a new corporate outcomes framework developed by cabinet members and strategic commissioners; this framework provides a statement of ECCs purpose. It sets out seven outcomes that ECC want to secure for the people of Essex through its work with public sector partners, businesses, Voluntary Community Services and with local communities.   cid:image001.png@01CFFF3E.C305DBB0   * 1. Adoption and Special Guardianship Order support services contribute to the following outcomes within ECC’s Corporate Framework: * People in Essex can live independently and exercise control over their lives * Children in Essex get the best start in life. * People in Essex enjoy good health and wellbeing |
| 1. **Background, national and local context** |
| **Background**  **National context** The primary legislation and guidance that drives the commissioning of specialist adoption and SGO support are:  * Adoption and Children Act 2002 * The Children and Families Act 2014 * The Local Authority Adoption (England) Regulations 2003 * The Voluntary Adoption Agencies and the Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2003 * Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 * Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013 * Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 * Adoption Support Services (Amendment) Regulations 2014 * Adoption Statutory Guidance 2013 * Adoption National Minimum Standards 2014 * Practice Guidance on Assessing the Support Needs of Adoptive Families * Special Guardianship Regulations 2005   1. Essex County Council has a statutory duty to provide adoption and SGO support services. The adoption support passport provided by the Department for Education outlines the support services adoptive families can expect the following: * Counselling, information and advice * Help with behavioural, attachment and other problems * Money e.g. to help with special care needs, or for former foster parents * Help with contact between an adopted child and his or her birth family * Meetings and events to enable groups of adopters and adoptive children to get together * Training to help adopters to meet the needs of their adoptive child * Short breaks for an adopted child with another carer * Help where an adoption breaks down.   1. Following on from the Department for Education’s 2013 report, “Further Action for Adoption: Finding more loving homes”, the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) was made available to all Adoption Agencies in England in May 2015, to provide additional funding for therapeutic support for Adoptive Families. Essex County Council has been working actively with adoptive families and providers to make best use of the ASF. Whilst the future funding arrangement for the ASF in not yet clear, learning from the fund around effective therapeutic provision has been fed into the development of this specification.   **Local context and drivers: local guidance and practice**   * 1. There is currently an Adoption Support Team and a Special Guardianship Order Support Team within Family Operations. These teams are based centrally and offer county-wide delivery. The teams provide universal to complex adoption and Special Guardianship Order support and spot purchase a variety of additional specialist support when necessary. When families first contact the service, the team undertakes an assessment of their support needs to decide if further support is required and where required, develop a support plan with the family.   2.5 The Adoption Service currently offers the following support services to adoptive and Special Guardian Families:   * Training & Workshops - Training sessions are provided to adoptive/SGO families on a variety of topics that are relevant to the majority of service users e.g. Parenting Support, Matching and Introductions, Friends and Family workshop and Communicating and Connecting. * Contact- support with direct and postal contact between birth families and the children that have been adopted or are subject to Special Guardianship Order. * Social work interventions e.g. advice, guidance and face to face support, professional networking, support to schools * Therapeutic work – therapeutic child and parenting work, direct work and life story work with children,   2.6 The following procedures and policies are followed by the service and all services commissioned should follow the principles set out in them:   * Adoption Support Procedure and guidance 2015 * Special Guardianship Order Policy 2015 * The Adoption Service Policy and Statement of Purpose   1. Essex County Council has collaborated with all 7 Clinical Commissioning Groups and Southend and Thurrock Councils to re-commission integrated Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Services (EWMHS) for all children and young people age 0-18 (or up to 25 for those with a Special Educational Need and/or Disability) with targeted and specialist mental health needs. It is expected that providers of these adoption support services will work closely with ECC and the new EWMH Service to develop pathways of support and ensure that adoptive and Special Guardianship Order Children and Families access the right support at the right time. Please find more details in the below link:   <http://www.nelft.nhs.uk/services-ewmhs>  **Local drivers: engagement with families and staff**   * 1. Engagement has taken place with Special Guardianship Order and adoptive families as well as internal ECC staff to gather an understanding of the current spot purchased services that are effective and those that are required for the future. Through this engagement, many Special Guardianship Order and adoptive families commented that they would like more of the support that they are currently receiving and some new services not currently received. For adoptive families the additional services frequently requested are respite/short breaks, additional therapeutic interventions, training on specific themes that affect their child/ren, and help to engage with schools effectively to meet their child’s needs. For Special Guardianship Order families, feedback indicated they would like increased access to peer support groups, and extra-curricular activities. Respite/short breaks in particular are a service which has only recently been provided by the Adoption Service, and needs to be expanded to meet the requests of families.   **Aims and objectives**   * 1. The aim of this specification is to improve the stability and resilience of Adoptive and Special Guardianship order families by strengthening the range and quality of support services available to them, and enabling effective peer support. This will be achieved through commissioning a framework of support services with a number of lots (described in section 3) to ensure that there are effective and relevant support services available across Essex. Future support will be commissioned through this framework rather than the current spot purchasing arrangement wherever possible.   2. This should ensure that ECC can meet the following objectives: * Improve children’s emotional, social and mental well-being, self-esteem and ability to develop and maintain positive relationships. * Prevent and reduce adoption breakdowns, and enable children subject of adoption and special guardianship orders to reach their full potential; * Improve outcomes for children and families through improving the availability of therapeutic and specialist support; * Ensure that the most cost efficient and effective services can be supplied to families. |
| 1. **Scope** |
| **Outcomes**  3.1 The outcomes to be delivered are:   * Reducing and/or preventing adoption and Special Guardianship Order placement disruptions and children re-entering care. * Children and families affected by adoption or Special Guardianship Orders achieve and maintain stability and reach their full potential as individuals and as family groups. * Adoptive and Special Guardianship Order families enjoy strong and stable family relationships. * Adoptive and Special Guardianship Order families are resilient and have the skills and knowledge to support themselves and each other.   **Criteria**   * 1. The commissioned services will be provided to families for whom ECC holds the statutory responsibility for adoption and Special Guardianship Order support services. The vast majority of families will reside within the ECC boundary, although a small proportion may reside outside the boundary, but still be eligible for a service.   **Current numbers**   * 1. The numbers of children made subject of Special Guardianship Orders has grown since their inception in 2005, therefore the demand for support services for this group will continue to increase. Please see table below of the number of Special Guardianship Orders made in the last 9 years. Many of these children are still under 10 years old, so we should therefore assume demand for support will grow:  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | Year | 06 | 07 | 08 | 09 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 13 | 14 | | Amount | 12 | 20 | 40 | 35 | 78 | 108 | 130 | 67 | 82 | 48 |  |  |     The numbers of Adoption Orders made over recent years fluctuates; therefore we should predict that demand for support services will at least maintain at current level. Please see chart below of Adoption Orders made since 2008.   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | Year | 08/09 | 09/10 | 10/11 | 11/12 | 12/13 | 13/14 | 14/15 | | Amount | 45 | 57 | 46 | 94 | 73 | 112 | 95 |   **Referral process**  3.4 Below is an outline of the referral process that each commissioned service will be required to follow:    **Key components**   * 1. The key components (lots) for this service are listed here and described in detail below: * Specialist training for adoptive families and those with Special Guardianship Orders * Specialist assessment for adoptive families and those with Special Guardianship Orders; beyond the scope of the Local Authority’s assessment of support needs * Mediation * Specialist therapeutic support for Adoptive families and those with Special Guardianship Orders * Respite/short breaks   It is expected that these five services will be delivered through a framework.  **Lot 1- Training**  Based on assessment of need, from time to time adoptive and Special Guardianship families require specialist training in order to provide them with skills and knowledge to undertake the re-parenting task. This training may be on an individual or group basis, provided within Essex, and ECC venues, or within provider premises. This training may also include the training of Essex County Council Adoption and Special Guardianship support staff.  Essex County Council has already agreed a training offer for the 2016/17 financial year which will be provided outside of this specification. The training to be provided through this specification will complement this training and be decided in partnership with Essex County Council Adoption staff. The issues covered will respond to families’ identified need and include, but not be limited to, the following:   * Attachment difficulties/developmental trauma * Parenting children with attachment difficulties * Transitions * Educational Issues * Parenting at different developmental stages * Life Story and contact * Aggression and violence * The effects of abuse and trauma * Neuroscience and brain development * Training social work teams   Providers will work collaboratively with the relevant Adoption Team Manager to ensure training programmes are developed and delivered that meet assessed needs, and respond to the issues arising from service user feedback.  **Lot 2 -Specialist/comprehensive assessments**.  Following an ECC social work assessment of support needs, there are occasions when a specialist assessment is indicated. The assessments that this service will provide include, but are not limited to, the following:   * Comprehensive systemic family assessments * Psychological & psychiatric assessments * Assessments of therapeutic needs * Assessments of contact needs * Sensory integration/occupational therapy assessments * Multi-disciplinary assessments   ECC will refer individual children and/or families for specialist assessment on a case by case basis, where the assessment of need has indicated this is required to inform future intervention. The service envisages referrals for up to 20 children / families per annum.  **Lot 3-Mediation**  To improve family relationships and achieve a meaningful and positive contact between children and their birth families specialist support is often required particularly with Special Guardianship Order families but also with those families involved in Adoption. Providers will ensure that contact is positive for the child and supports the above outcomes. Mediation within the Special Guardianship Order Support context would be defined as a non-legal way of resolving disputes around contact between the children and their parents in order to avoid a court process.  The Mediator will act as an impartial third party and facilitate discussion between primarily Special Guardians and parents but also families involved in Adoption enabling them to reach suitable and mutually acceptable agreements around contact arrangements.  The Mediators will be expected to be registered with the Family Mediation Council (FMC) and accredited with the FMC and are therefore referred to as Family Mediation Council Accredited (FMCA). To obtain this they have should have completed a family mediation training course which is recognised by the FMC or the Law Society and have then completed a portfolio of case work which has been approved by either the FMC or the LS.  In addition to this they may need to be members of National Family Mediation (NFM) and the College of Mediators. The provider will liaise directly with the relevant Team Manager in order to ensure mediation services are provided to individual families where the assessment of need has identified that mediation is required.  **Lot 4 -Therapeutic Interventions**  Adopted children and those subject to a Special Guardianship Order often have moderate to complex mental health and emotional well-being needs. Therapeutic interventions are required to assist both children and adults to deal with feelings of loss and rejection, as well as the long term effects of abuse and trauma. Commissioned therapeutic interventions will work towards the following outcomes for children and families:   * Building resilience * Enhancing self-esteem and sense of self/identity * Improving and sustaining relationships * Promoting attachments * Recovery from trauma * Processing loss and grief * Children achieve an understanding of their life story * Enabling children to engage and achieve in education   The commissioned services will promote the above outcomes using a range of effective therapeutic interventions, which may include but not be limited to:   * Psychotherapy * Systemic Therapy * Therapeutic Life Story Work * Psycho-Social Education * Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy. * Theraplay * Filial Therapy * Music Therapy * Art Therapy * Drama Therapy * Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) * Sensory Integration Therapy * Non-violent resistance   ECC will refer individual children and/or families for specialist therapeutic intervention on a case by case basis, where the assessment has identified this as a need. The Service envisages referring approximately 100 plus individual children or families to therapeutic services per annum. Service providers will liaise directly with the commissioning social worker for each child/family, and a contract of work established on a case by case basis. Information will be shared between the provider and commissioning social worker in order to ensure the service continues to meet the assessed needs of the child / family.  **Lot 5- Short Breaks**  The right to request respite is clearly set out in the Adoption Passport, and the need for this service has been identified through feedback from user groups. Short breaks are beneficial in reducing the likelihood of placement disruption and also provide an opportunity for peer support and training. The constructive activity during short breaks also builds resilience, self-esteem and emotional wellbeing.  In the last two years, Essex Adoption Services provided a residential short break experience (2 x full days and 1 overnight) for 10 young people age 11-13 years, and two separate residential weekend breaks (Friday to Sunday) for 10 single parent families and 7 two-parent families. As part of our future support programme, we are keen to develop a wider range of services to include but not be limited to overnight and daily breaks, for both the family and child alone, for Special Guardianship Order and Adoptive families.  The commissioned service will liaise directly with the Adoption Service Manager in order to agree respite / short break arrangements that respond to the presenting needs of families requesting support.  **Requirements and principles for the service**   * 1. Requirements for the service:   All providers must be suitably recruited, DBS checked in accordance with current legislation, qualified to undertake the commissioned task, and be professionally registered where appropriate.Ofsted Registration is not required but where you are Ofsted registered a minimum Ofsted rating of Good must be maintained for the duration of the contract. In the event that the rating falls below this level the authority reserves the right to terminate the contract.   * 1. Principles for the services: * **Engagement-** Services must be organised around the needs of adoptive and Special Guardianship Order families and take account of their views and preferences. Providers will have to evidence that service users have contributed to the direction and development of the service. * **Communication-** The service user knows, and receives written information about, the service they are to receive; what the service is designed to achieve; what is involved in the particular service provision and how the service will be monitored to ensure that it is delivering the intended outcome. * **Family Approach –** The service providers will take a whole family approach to adoptive and Special Guardianship Order families. A holistic approach will be taken to ensure that the needs of children and their families are met. * **Prevention and Early Intervention –** Services will provide a timely response to all referrals and will work in partnership with Essex County Council Adoption and Special Guardianship Order support services to highlight issues of concern. * **Promoting independence –** the service will show a commitment to developing independence and resilience in families. * **Partnership working -** Services should have or be able to develop rapidly the knowledge and ability to work collaboratively with other services including those that also support adoptive and Special Guardianship Order families * **Avoid duplication –** To work with commissioners to ensure services do not duplicate what is provided internally. * **Sustainability** – Providers will ensure services are planned in a way that sustains improved outcomes. * **Flexible working –** providers will work flexibly with ECC and families to meet required needs on a case by case basis. * **Joint Working -** The service will work together with Children’s Social Care to support children/young people to provide a safe place that addresses physical and emotional needs. Child protection and wider safeguarding will be managed according to the Southend, Essex and Thurrock (SET) procedures. The service will collaborate with Essex County Council Social Care to ensure the safety of vulnerable children and adults are responded to swiftly and that all legal requirements are commenced as early as possible after the need has been identified.   1. **Population covered:**   The service will cover the Essex County Council area excluding Southend and Thurrock. Specifically those families for whom ECC has responsibility to provide adoption and SGO support services, in accordance with:   * Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 * Adoption Support Services (Amendment) Regulations 2014 * Adoption Statutory Guidance 2013 * Adoption National Minimum Standards 2014 * Special Guardianship Order Regulations 2005   **3.9 Workforce**  Providers will have access to a workforce with the right combination of skills, knowledge, experience and qualifications to work with individuals and families, which will include:   * Good interpersonal skills and the ability to work sensitively with adoptive and Special Guardianship Order families * Current qualifications relevant to the interventions being delivered * Current registration to any relevant professional bodies * Formal training relevant to the intervention delivered * The correct case management and supervision procedures in place |
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| **5. Performance Monitoring Framework** |
| Providers must work closely with the Essex County Council to develop effective monitoring and reporting framework that is relevant to the intervention/ lot to measure, assess and report on the impact of interventions for children, young people and parent/carers.  **Activity Recording**   * 1. Activity recording templates will be agreed between ECC and providers in the first month of the new contract being in place and will be tailored to each specific service lot but will include as a minimum: * No. of children/young people/families/carers referred into the activity or intervention * Waiting times for services * No. of children and young people/families/carers accessing the activity or intervention * No. of children/young people/families/carers completing sessions and number of sessions completed * Feedback from service users on their experience of the service including complaints/compliments/comments * No. of children/young people/families/carers who Do Not Attend (DNA rate) or who drop out of interventions * Information on gender and ethnicity of service users.   **Outcomes and quality recording and reporting**  ECC will work with providers to agree outcomes monitoring tools and quality indicators within the first month of the start of the new contract. The outcomes monitoring tool will be developed for each specific lot but it is expected that providers will work with ECC to develop a consistent outcomes monitoring tool.  Regular (monthly/quarterly/post intervention) activity and outcomes reporting will be required, proportionate to the size of the contract and the type of intervention being delivered. There will be scheduled contract monitoring between the provider, the commissioner and/or a contract manager and data analyst. The frequency of these meetings will be determined by the size of each contract. Performance will be measured against section 3 of this specification and test progress against the 4 core outcomes set out:   * Reducing and/or preventing adoption and Special Guardianship Order placement disruptions and children re-entering care. * Children and families affected by adoption or Special Guardianship Orders achieve and maintain stability and reach their full potential as individuals and as family groups. * Adoptive and Special Guardianship Order families enjoy strong and stable family relationships. * Adoptive and Special Guardianship Order families are resilient and have the skills and knowledge to support themselves and each other |