



**Corporate Parenting Committee
21 July 2015**

**Report from the Strategic
Director of Children and Young People**

**Brent Adoption Service Report
1 October 2014 – 31 March 2015**

1.0 Summary

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to provide information to the Council's Corporate Parenting Committee about the general management of the adoption service and how it is achieving good outcomes for children.
- 1.2** This report details the activity of Brent's adoption service from October 1st 2014 – 31st March 2015.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1** The Corporate Parenting Committee is requested to review, comment on and question the contents of this report. This is to provide evidence that the management of the adoption service is being monitored and challenged in order to promote good outcomes for children. This is in line with standard 25.6 of the Adoption National Minimum Standards (2014).

3.0 Background

- 3.1** Our 2014-15 Adoption Statement of Purpose highlights the outcomes that the service aims to support:
- 3.2** That all children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family that can meet their developmental needs during childhood and beyond.
- 3.3** That adopted children should have an enjoyable childhood, benefit from excellent parenting and education and experience a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.

- 3.4** That children, their birth parents and families, as well as adoptive parents and their families will be valued and respected.
- 3.5** Since the 1st April 2014, adoption services have been delivered through two teams, A Kinship, Fostering and Adoption Assessment team – responsible for the recruitment, assessment and training of prospective adopters, as well as family finding and support for them post approval up until Adoption Order.
- 3.6** An Adoption and Post Permanency team – responsible for family finding for children with an adoption plan; statutory social work responsibility for children subject to a Placement Order up until Adoption Order; supporting adoptive families, Special Guardians and birth families and providing a counselling and intermediary service for adopted adults and their birth relatives.

4.0 Performance Data

- 4.1** The most recent set of national adoption scorecards were published in December 2014, covering the 3-year period 2012-14. The draft Brent data that was presented to the previous Corporate Parenting Committee has been confirmed and is as follows:

Table 1: The average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted.

Rank	LA Code	LA Name	Indicator value for the 3 year average in 2012, 2013 and 2014 (days)	Indicator value for the 3 year average in 2011, 2012 and 2013 (days)	Indicator value for the 3 year average in 2010, 2011 and 2012 (days)
		ENGLAND	628	647	636
72	304	Brent	600	694	854

Table 2: The average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family

Rank	LA Code	LA Name	Indicator value for the 3 year average in 2012, 2013 and 2014 (days)	Indicator value for the 3 year average in 2011, 2012 and 2013 (days)	Indicator value for the 3 year average in 2010, 2011 and 2012 (days)
		ENGLAND	217	210	195
137	304	Brent	306	367	343

Table 3: The percentage of children who wait less than 18 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family

Rank	LA Code LA Name	Indicator value for the 3 year average in 2012, 2013 and 2014 (%)	Indicator value for the 3 year average in 2011, 2012 and 2013 (%)	Indicator value for the 3 year average in 2010, 2011 and 2012 (%)
	ENGLAND	51	49	47
78	304 Brent	50	48	42

4.2 Brent's timeliness performance as measured within the A1 indicator (table 1) is now better than the England average, a significant improvement from the position two years' ago. Whilst our A2 indicator (table 2) is higher than the national average our performance is significantly affected by the data related to one child. Local authorities with lower overall numbers are disproportionately affected by a measurement system based on averages. If this child's information were not contained within the cohort the average number of days would be below the England average. Our performance in relation to the A3 indicator (table 3) has also continued to improve so that half of Brent's children with adoption plans move to their permanent families within 18 months of entering care.

4.3 The next set of adoption scorecards covering the period 2013-15 will not be released until the end of this calendar year. Whilst it is not yet possible to provide comparative data the projections for the A1 and A2 indicators have continued to improve:

A1: 544 days

A2: 197 days

Child related data – October 2014 – March 2015

4.4 In the second six months of this reporting year 7 children were adopted making a total of 12 adoptions for the year.

4.5 At the 31st March 2015 there were 12 Looked After Children with an adoption plan. The details of these children's cases are as follows:

- Two children's plans are changing away from adoption.

- Seven children are subject to Placement Orders; two of these children are placed with adopters, two are to be adopted by their current foster carers and the other three children are due to be matched with adopters at the May Adoption and Permanency Panel.
- Three children where Placement Orders have not yet been made and where there is background family finding from the Adoption team.

4.6 As stated in the previous report, all Local Authorities continue to report a reduction in the number of children being made subject to Placement Orders. A Placement Order is the court authorisation that a child can be formally placed with approved adopters. This was reinforced by data released by the Adoption Leadership Board in November 2014 that demonstrated a 34% reduction in the number of Placement Orders being granted between September 2013 - June 2014. Whilst Brent continues to report a consistent number of annual adoptions there has been a recent reduction in Placement Orders made and this may reduce our overall numbers in the next 12 months.

4.7 The ages of the 7 children adopted within this reporting period ranged from 1 to 9 years. Three of the children are a group of brother and sisters. Of the 7 children adopted, six were with Brent recruited adopters and one with adopters from another agency.

Adopter Recruitment

4.8 At 31st March 2015 Brent had 14 approved adoptive households for children where a child had not yet been matched or placed. The number of children requiring adoption and not yet matched or placed continues to be lower than the number of approved adopters.

4.9 During the reporting period the service received 43 enquiries about adoption. Many people following this enquiry were signposted to our monthly information evenings. The enquiries received have resulted in 5 ongoing adoption assessments and 8 adoptive households being approved during the reporting period. Of the 5 on-going adoption assessments, 1 is in stage one and 4 are in stage two of the process.

4.10 Two Brent approved adoptive households were matched to children within the reporting period. In both cases these adopters waited more than 12 months for a suitable match although there had been extensive support offered to both families to help them with family finding. The length of time is

also an indicator of the reduction in children currently available for adoption and the fact that many adopters are showing interest in the same children.

- 4.11 Brent continues to attract adopters from a diversity of backgrounds in order to best meet the variety of needs of our Looked After Children. However, in line with the general profile of adopters nationally, the majority of Brent adopters currently waiting to be linked or matched to children are of white British or Asian heritage.

Adoption Support

- 4.12 At the 31st March 2015 there were 47 families receiving an adoption support package from the Local Authority. This support was primarily provided through financial allowances which are reviewed and means tested. This figure has remained stable, as new adoption support packages are balanced by those ending as children reach the age of 18.
- 4.13 A further 70 families were in receipt of other post-adoption support services within the reporting period. These support services ranged from therapeutic services for families to birth records counselling and tracing services for adopted adults.

5.0 The Adoption and Permanence Panel

- 5.1 The purpose and role of the Adoption and Permanence panel was set out in detail within a previous Brent Adoption Service Report (1st April - 30th September 2014) to the Corporate Parenting Committee.
- 5.2 The Panel continues to meet once a month in respect of all matters concerning adoption. A joint annual training day for adoption panel members and the adoption team staff was held in January 2015 and was delivered by the British Agency for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF). The next training day has been scheduled for October 2015.
- 5.3 Panel feedback from adopters and social workers attending has been consistent in confirming that the panel is robust in nature and that attendees felt able to express their views and opinions. Feedback concerning the performance of the social work casework is provided to the Agency Decision Maker who ensures this is given to the Head of Service, Placements, for follow up with individual staff or, should the issues be more systemic, broader service improvement. An example of this would be the perceived delay in processing applicants through stage 1 of the adoption process. As a

result the deputy team manager has introduced a more robust tracking system to support the timely receipt of overseas checks where they are required.

- 5.4 During the period 1st October – 31st March 2015 six panels were held with fifteen specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group:
- 5.5 Fourteen applicants (eight households) were recommended as suitable to adopt
- 5.6 Two children were recommended to be placed for adoption with specific carers
- 5.7 One long-term fostering match (for a sibling group of three) was recommended
- 5.8 Seven prospective adopters (four households) were found suitable to continue as prospective adopters following their annual review.
- 5.9 There were no recommendations made for termination of any prospective adopters' approval during this period.
- 5.10 All of the recommendations made to the Agency Decision Maker were ratified.

6.0 Service Improvement

- 6.1 Over the last six months, the service has continued to improve outcomes for children with adoption plans in the following ways:
- 6.2 Through effective tracking of timescales at monthly permanency planning meetings and quarterly tracking meetings for children with an adoption plan. This activity contributes to a reduction in the period of time from a child becoming Looked After to being placed for adoption as evidenced in sections 4.1 – 4.3 above.
- 6.3 By ensuring that most children who are adopted receive their lifestory book within 10 days of the adoption ceremony, enabling them to make sense of their history as they grow and develop with their new family.
- 6.4 By developing services with adoption leads from other West London Local Authorities in order to share children's and adopters' profiles to enhance the pool of prospective placements.

Recruitment & Assessment Initiatives.

- 6.5 The sharing of preparation training with the London boroughs of Hillingdon, Hounslow and Ealing continues to work successfully so that prospective adopters are able to access this training and support quickly.

Adoption Support

- 6.6 A summary of the general activity undertaken in this area was provided within the Brent Adoption Service Report (1st April - 30th September 2014) to the Corporate Parenting Committee.
- 6.7 A significant development has been the establishment of a project with the Post Adoption Centre (PAC) and the West London Adoption Consortium to target support to children within schools where there are concerns about behaviour and attainment. Each authority within the consortium was able to nominate schools within their borough with whom PAC have been working. Activity was focused on direct work with nominated children and the staff group to encourage longer-term changes within staff understanding. The project is due for completion in September 2015.
- 6.8 The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) has been developed during the reporting period. This is a national initiative from central government to encourage the growth of services and the ability of adopters to access support. The fund is intended to provide therapeutic support services to families such as training programmes for parents; Theraplay; Music/Art/Drama therapy. It does not act as a substitute for services the Local Authority ordinarily provides, such as mediation, contact intervention and financial support. Ten Local Authorities implemented a prototype of the ASF in 2014. The national roll out of the ASF is from May 2015 with a budget of £19million, funded by central government in the first year.
- 6.9 The DfE commissioned consultants to meet each Local Authority to ensure readiness for the implementation of the ASF. Our consultant met with Brent representatives from Placements and Finance in January 2015 with a report produced the following month. It concluded that Brent had low external support needs in order to implement the ASF, with the majority of the processes required already in place to enable Brent to submit applications. Brent has low adoption numbers and there have been equally low numbers of support packages provided that would meet the ASF criteria in the last two years.
- 6.10 The areas that required development such as our financial systems, ensuring the ASF is publicised locally and stimulating the local market will be in place by the time of the ASF implementation from May 2015.

Involving Adopters

- 6.11 Adopters are involved closely in matching and linking and subsequent planning in a variety of ways.
- 6.12 Many of our adoptive families attended our annual Christmas party, a fun and enjoyable way for us to engage with our families and for them to network informally with others. This is detailed in appendix one, the winter newsletter for our adopters.
- 6.13 Adopters are encouraged to attend, with the support of their social worker, Consortium run Profiling Events, Adoption Exchange Events and the Adoption Activity Days that are jointly run in London by BAAF and the four London Consortia.
- 6.14 A bimonthly Adopters Support Group is held, currently facilitated by adoption social workers, who also provide a crèche, with the aim that this will eventually be run by the adopters themselves without the need for social work input.

Adopter Feedback

- 6.15 One formal complaint was received from Brent approved adopters during this reporting period. This related to dissatisfaction with what was perceived to be factual inaccuracies within a professional's report and the storage on the filing system of this information. This complaint is in the process of resolution.

Staff Engagement.

- 6.16 Staff are encouraged to think creatively and innovatively and are engaged to help the adoption service develop in a number of different ways. They have contributed to articles for the newsletter and have worked collaboratively to revise the operation of the team to ensure that post-permanency tasks are better co-ordinated. Training opportunities for staff in the borough and within West London have been provided in areas such as concurrency. This is an arrangement where an individual or couple are approved jointly as foster carers and adopters with the ability to look after a child whose care plan is not established but who may be adopted in the future.

7.0 Broader adoption issues and the future

- 7.1 Brent chairs the West London Adoption Consortium (WLAC), providing an opportunity to shape services across the region. A review of the current structure and operation of the consortium was commissioned and reported in October 2014. The recommendations were that the consortium would benefit from clearer terms of reference and a more focused work plan that held agencies to account and enabled progress to be measured more effectively.
- 7.2 Following the review a draft memorandum of understanding and workplan were completed that will ensure agencies are clearer of their responsibilities. Post-adoption support was a specific area of joint agreement where joint-commissioning of services will be prioritised – potentially through the adoption support fund. The co-ordinator of the WLAC will also move within the West London Alliance staffing arrangements and this will lead to greater co-ordination with other work streams and aid more effective delivery of projects.
- 7.3 The National Adoption Leadership board, concerned about the reduction in numbers of Placement Orders (see section 4.4 above), published a ‘myth buster’ document in November 2014, aimed at clarifying the national position and to ensure social workers did not misinterpret recent judicial rulings that had led some to believe a higher test for adoption had been introduced. We are confident in Brent that, where adoption is the best outcome for a child, we will pursue this course of action directly and without delay.
- 7.4 Whilst this report relates to the Oct 2014 – March 2015 period a significant national development was announced in May 2015 within the Queen’s speech. Local Authorities will be encouraged to establish regional adoption agencies within 2 years with the risk of these services being removed if sufficient progress is not made. Within the WLAC discussions will be taking place over the next 6 months as to how we wish to shape our future services for the benefit of children.

Appendix – Adoption Newsletter Winter 2015

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