



Corporate Parenting Committee
28 April 2016

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

**Brent Adoption Service Report
1 October 2015 – 31 March 2016**

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 2015 – 31st March 2016.

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 2015-16 Adoption Statement of Purpose highlights the outcomes that the service aims to support:
 - Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family that can meet their developmental needs during childhood and beyond.
 - Adopted children should have an enjoyable childhood, benefit from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.
 - Children, birth parents/guardians and families, and adoptive parents and families will be valued and respected.

3.2 In Brent adoption services are delivered through two teams:

- A Placements Assessment and Recruitment 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.
- 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. Performance Data

4.1 The most recent set of national adoption scorecards were published in March 2016, covering the 3-year period 2013-15¹.

4.2 Brent performance against the two most significant indicators has continued to improve:

- **A1** (The time taken from a child entering care to being placed for adoption): 544 days. This is a 9% improvement against the previous reporting period and compares against a national average of 593 days.
- **A2** (The time taken from the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved): 194 days². This is a 37% improvement against the previous reporting period and compares against a national average of 223 days.

4.3 Internal projections for the next 3-year average (2013-14 to 2015-16) have been produced. This updated adoption timeliness data shows the following continued performance improvements. As at 30th September 2015 the indicators were as follows:

- **A1:** 494 days.
- **A2:** 184 days.

4.4 Child related data – 1st October 2015 – 31st March 2016

- In the second six months of this reporting year 5 children were adopted. There were six children adopted in total this reporting year.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adoption-scorecards>

² The DfE confirmed the published scorecard did not reflect the accurate A2 position for Brent (194 days). This anomaly is captured within the scorecard.

- At the 31st March there were 9 Looked After Children with an adoption plan who had not yet been adopted. The details of these children's cases are as follows:
 - Four children are placed for adoption.
 - Three children are due to be matched at the Adoption Panel in June 2016 with a view to being placed for adoption during the same month.
 - Two children have not yet been made subject of Placement Orders – in these cases there is background family finding from the adoption team.

- One child's plans changed away from adoption during this period. This was a child whose mother initially wanted to relinquish her for adoption, but later changed her mind. The child has been successfully rehabilitated into her parents' care.

- As stated in previous reports, 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. Brent has also seen a reduction in numbers of children with placement orders and as a result our projection of the number of adoptions for this reporting year was correct.

4.5 Adopter Recruitment

- At 31st March 2016 Brent had 12 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.
- During the reporting period the service received 60 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 (1 being a step-parent assessment) and 2 adoptive households being approved during the reporting period. Of the 4 on-going adoption assessments all are in stage two of the process.
- Three Brent approved adoptive households were matched to children within the reporting period. Two of the families waited between 3-6 months after approval. In the other case the adopters waited more than 12 months for a suitable match, although there had been extensive support offered to assist with family finding.

- 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.

4.6 Adoption Support

- In 2015-16, 74 families received a post-adoption support package (not one-off advice). This support was primarily provided through financial allowances which are reviewed and means tested but also includes lifestory work, strategies for managing difficult behaviour and advice on managing emotional issues within families brought about through contact with birth families.
- In the six months between 1st October 2015 and 31st March 2016, 10 new families have requested adoption support. Of these families three have had successful applications to the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) following an assessment. Five further ASF assessments are in process. One of the ASF applications in progress is a collaboration with a local school. Brent is trying to obtain continued funding for their therapeutic nurture group, which supports nine adopted children.
- Seventy-one adopted adults also received adoption support. This was in the form of provision of access to their records, linking them with members of their birth family, and providing counselling support around issues related to adoption.

5. The Adoption and Permanence Panel

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.
- 5.3** The next joint panel training day has been scheduled for May 2016, the focus of which is effective linking and matching in order to prevent placement disruption.
- 5.4** In line with statutory guidance, a central list of panel members is used on a rotating basis to ensure members maintain regular links with Brent and current issues in adoption. The central list consists of an independent chair,

an independent vice chair, other independent members including a birth mother with experience of adoption, an elected member, an adopted person, a former Looked After Child and a foster carer from another Local Authority. There are also panel members employed by Brent, including representatives from education, health, the probation service and Children's Centres. All panel members contribute to an annual appraisal and have the opportunity to attend any additional relevant training provided by Brent and the West London Adoption Consortium.

5.5 Panel feedback from prospective and approved adopters and presenting social workers has remained consistent in confirming good or excellent comments regarding the panel process and conduct. 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.

5.6 During the period 1st October 2015 – 31st March 2016 four panels were held with thirteen specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group:

- Three households were recommended as suitable to adopt.
- Two children were recommended to be placed for adoption with specific carers
- The long-term fostering matches of three children were discussed.
- One prospective adopter resigned.

All of the recommendations made to the Agency Decision Maker were ratified.

6. 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:

- Through effective tracking of timescales at initial and monthly permanency planning meetings at a team manager level, supplemented by quarterly tracking at Head of Service level for children with an adoption plan. This effective oversight continues to contribute to a reduction in the period of time from a child becoming Looked After to being placed for adoption.
- By ensuring that adoptive families have been assessed and then enabled to access the ASF. This has provided families with targeted therapeutic support when it has been most needed.

- By refining and improving the preparation training for prospective adopters in conjunction with other West London Local Authorities.
- By providing our adopters waiting for a suitable child with a regular support group whereby they can meet with other families to discuss concerns, hear other experiences and ensure we provide services appropriate to individual families' needs.

6.2 Adoption Support. 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.

As described earlier in this report, a number of successful applications have been made to the Adoption Support Fund in order to support families requiring help with their parenting.

6.3 Involving Adopters. Many adopters continue to remain closely involved with the service.

- Approved adopters are involved in speaking to prospective adopters at information evenings and preparation groups.
- Adopters are invited to attend relevant training for foster carers where there are crossover issues.
- As described above, in response to the expressed need for adopters waiting for a match we established our 'Next Steps' support group. This takes place bi-monthly and covers a range of issues relevant to the adoption process.
- A bi-monthly Adopters' Support Group for families with children is well established and feedback is positive about the supportive nature of the group. A crèche is provided for this group. Many of the participants in the group attended and enjoyed our annual festive party in December 2015.

6.4 Adopter Feedback. One formal complaint was received from a Brent approved adopter during this reporting period. This related to dissatisfaction with the process of approving an adoption allowance. The adopter took the matter to Stage Two of the corporate complaints' process and subsequently to the Local Government Ombudsman. The finding was that Brent had no case to answer and had acted appropriately in its dealings with the adopter.

There have been no new complaints in the second half of this reporting year.

6.5 Staff Engagement. Staff continue to take responsibility for the delivery of adoption preparation courses across other West London authorities.

Two staff members attended a four day training course run by the West London Alliance on 'direct, therapeutic work' with children. Other staff are now booked to attend the same training in the coming year.

Staff have continued to deliver a regular programme of Life Story Work training to foster carers and also a regular, separate Life Story Work training to social work colleagues across Children's Social Care. Managers have also delivered the first of a regular training workshop on 'Permanency Planning' to social work colleagues in the Locality and Care Planning Teams

7. Ofsted Inspection

7.1 The Ofsted single inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers took place between 14th September and 8th October 2015. The final report was published on 30th November 2015.

7.2 The inspection of adoption services was judged as 'good'. There were a number of positive findings:

- Adoption is considered early for all children. A well-reasoned rationale is clearly recorded to explain decisions where adoption is not the most appropriate plan to meet children's needs.
- Regular permanence planning meetings are routinely attended by the placements service, ensuring that key staff are aware of all children who may require adoption. Parallel planning is well established.
- Timeliness of adoption work has significantly improved and this trend is continuing in 2015–16.
- Adopter assessments are of good quality, identifying the strengths and vulnerabilities of adopters, which assists in the matching of children with adopters.
- The adoption and permanence panel has a suitably independent chair with a sufficiently wide range of members who are knowledgeable about adoption and permanence. This includes adopted adults, adopters and consistent elected member attendance. Panel administration is effective. The agency adviser provides robust quality assurance on the papers presented to panel, identifying deficits early, so that these can be rectified before panel and avoid delay.
- Adoption and post-permanence support is provided to all those who have had experience of adoption

7.3 There were no specific recommendations made within the report regarding the performance of the adoption service.

8. Broader adoption issues and the future

8.1 During this reporting period the Education and Adoption Act was passed. Full details regarding the implications of this piece of legislation were

presented to the Scrutiny Committee on 5th April 2016 and this is attached as an appendix to this report.

Appendix – Scrutiny Committee Report, 'National Adoption Reform Proposals', 5th April 2016

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