



**Corporate Parenting Committee  
19 April 2017**

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

**Brent Adoption Service Report, 1<sup>st</sup> October 2016 – 31<sup>st</sup>  
March 2017**

## **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 Oct 1<sup>st</sup> 2016– March 31<sup>st</sup> 2017.

## **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 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.

#### **4.0 Performance Data**

**4.1** The most recent set of national adoption scorecards will be published in April 2017, covering the 3-year period 2014-2016. The next round of national adoption scorecard data will be released in December 2017.

**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): 515 days. This is a 5.3% improvement against the previous reporting period (544) and compares against a national average of 558 days.
- **A2** (The time taken from the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved): 184 days. This is a 5.2% improvement against the previous reporting period (194) and compares against a national average of 226 days.

#### **4.3 Child related data – 1<sup>st</sup> October 2016 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017**

- In the second six months of this reporting year one child was adopted, bringing the total number of children adopted during the year 2016/2017 to four.
- At the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 there were 13 Looked After Children with an adoption plan who had not yet been adopted. The details of these children's cases are as follows:
  - Eight children are placed for adoption;
  - One child is placed with her prospective adopters on a Regulation 24 connected persons' fostering basis and is due to be matched at the Adoption Panel in April;
  - One child is due to be matched with the adopters of her older sibling once she is subject to a Placement Order;
  - Proactive family finding is being undertaken on the remaining three children with a view to matches being presented to the Adoption Panel within the next three months.
- 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.

#### **4.4 Adopter Recruitment**

- At 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 Brent had 9 approved adoptive households for children where a child had not yet been matched or placed. Two of these households are currently on hold because of changes in their circumstances. 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 28 enquiries about adoption, including one step parent adoption. However, the majority of preferences of enquirers did not match the various needs of the children needing adoptive homes, both in Brent and nationally, and in addition mirrored the ethnicity of existing Brent approved adopters, who have been waiting for suitable children for up to two years. Some of these enquiries were therefore signposted to First 4 Adoption, which is the National Gateway for adoption enquiries.

Following on from the last six monthly report, a decision was made to put the recruitment of adopters on hold, which was in line with neighbouring authorities. This was due to the very large number of approved adopters still waiting and the significantly reduced number of children needing adoptive homes. Towards the end of this reporting period, there has been a steady increase of children in Brent likely to need adoptive homes and therefore active recruitment for adopters has recommenced.

- At 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017, there were three ongoing adoption assessments, all of which are in Stage Two of the process. There has been one approval during this reporting period and there are currently two private adoption applications and one step parent application in Court Proceedings.
- One Brent approved adoptive household was matched to a child from another local authority within this reporting period. The lengthy waits which some adopters are experiencing reflect the reduction in children awaiting adoption nationally and the large number of adopters across the country awaiting placements. It is also recognised nationally that there continues to be a mismatch between adopters waiting and the children needing adoptive homes.

Brent strives to attract adopters from a diversity of backgrounds in order to best meet the variety of needs of our Looked After Children. Brent adopters currently waiting to be linked or matched to children are mainly of Asian and African Caribbean heritage.

## **4.5 Adoption Support**

- In the last six months, 85 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 life story 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 1<sup>st</sup> October 2016 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017, 3 new families have requested post adoption support. During this period, eight applications to the Adoption Support Fund were successfully approved to support the therapeutic needs of Brent families. Forty-six 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.

## **5.0 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 to the Corporate Parenting Committee.
- 5.2** The Panel continues to meet once a month in respect of all matters concerning adoption and to consider all long-term fostering matches. During the period under review three panels were cancelled due to lack of cases. This was due in part to the national shortage of children available for adoption and also to Brent's early linking and matching of those children who have a current adoption decision (the details of which are outlined elsewhere in this report).
- 5.3** A joint annual training day for adoption panel members and the adoption team staff is held as per statutory regulation; the last one was delivered on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2016 by Brent's Agency Advisor. The focus was on improving function and independent scrutiny, minimising disruptions and identifying particular areas of learning for Brent. The next training day will be held before July 2017.
- 5.4** A central list of panel members, in line with statutory guidance, 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; a previously fostered adult, a former Looked After Child and a foster carer from another Local Authority. There are also panel members employed by Brent, including: representatives from Children's Social Care; an Educational Psychologist; Health and an elected member. All panel members receive 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 (Operational Director – Integration and Improved Outcomes, Children and Young People’s Services) who ensures this is given to the Head of Service (LAC, Permanency and Care Leavers) for follow up with individual staff or, should the issues be more systemic, broader service improvement.
- 5.6** During the period 1<sup>st</sup> October 2016 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 three panels were held with fifteen specific cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group:
- One household was recommended as suitable to adopt;
  - Five children were recommended to be placed for adoption with specific carers (one set of twins and three single children)
  - The long-term fostering match of two children was recommended (a sibling group of two);
  - Six prospective adopters were recommended as remaining suitable to adopt following annual review; and
  - Two prospective adoptive households resigned; one due to not having been matched with a suitable child in the two years since their approval and the other due to becoming pregnant following approval.
- 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:
- 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 providing our adopters waiting for a suitable child with regular support 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**

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. Whilst in the past, most of the referrals for adoption support have come from adopters of adolescents, it has been noted that there has been a significant increase in behavioural and emotional concerns in relation to much younger children.

**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.
- A bi-monthly Adopters' Support Group for families with children is offered and although feedback has been positive about the supportive nature of the group, attendance in the last reporting period has been variable. A crèche is provided for this group. Many of the participants in the group attended and enjoyed our annual festive party in December 2016.

**6.4 Adopter Feedback** During this reporting period there have been no complaints received from adopters. Very positive feedback has been received by several Brent adopters and adopters from other local authorities about the high level of support provided by Brent Adoption Social Workers.

**6.5 Staff Engagement** Staff continue to take responsibility for the delivery of adoption preparation courses in conjunction with colleagues in the West London Adoption Consortium.

Staff deliver 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 set up and ran a training workshop on Permanency Planning for social workers in the Locality and Care Planning Teams.

## **7.0 Broader adoption issues and the future**

**7.1** On the 7<sup>th</sup> October 2016, we were notified of the immediate changes being made to the allocation of Adoption Support Fund (ASF) monies. As of the 7<sup>th</sup> October 2016 the ASF have capped the amount of financial support available to individual children. This is having an impact on some families as the projected therapeutic support package costs are in excess of £5k, meaning that support arrangements in these cases are modified as the Local Authority has no additional resource capacity to make up any shortfall.

## **7.2 Adoption Regionalisation**

**7.2.1** As discussed at Corporate Parenting Committee on 8<sup>th</sup> February, Cabinet considered a report on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2016 seeking approval for the Council to work collaboratively with other London boroughs to continue to develop the London Regional Agency (LRAA) with the intention of joining the agency when it becomes operational. Cabinet approved this approach.

**7.2.2** The last two months have seen several workshops for stakeholders in London where professionals have been encouraged to think about the LRAA and shape what it might look like. Brent have been represented at these workshops by the Acting Principal Officer, LAC & Permanency, the Team Manager for Adoption and Post Permanency and the Agency Panel Advisor and Quality Assurance lead.

In brief:

- Twenty-six London boroughs have signed up 'in principle' to the LRAA;
- Funding to take the project through to March 2018 has been agreed by the Department for Education (DfE);

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