



Corporate Parenting Committee

26 April 2018

Report from the Strategic Director, Children and Young People

Brent Adoption Service Report 1 October 2017 – 31 March 2018

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	N/A
Background Papers:	N/A
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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 1 October 2017 – 31 March 2018.

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 realise:

- 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 Following a realignment within Brent's Looked After Children (LAC) and Permanency Service in January 2018 all adoption services are delivered from within the Adoption and Post Permanency Team. This change was made in order to enhance the existing focus of activity within one team as well as to ensure the service was best able to respond to the future requirements to regionalise adoption services. The team is now responsible for:

- The recruitment, assessment and training of prospective adopters, as well as family finding and support for them post approval up until an Adoption Order is made.
- Family finding for children with an adoption plan; statutory social work responsibility for some children subject to a Placement Order up until an Adoption Order is made (all new cases now remain held by social workers within the care planning teams); 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 was published in August 2017, covering the 3-year period 2014-2016. **Adoption Scorecards (published [here](#))**

4.2 Our non-published data for the period 2015-2017 indicates that 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): 378.7 days. This is a 26% improvement against the previous reporting period (515) and compares against a national average of 558 days and our statistical neighbour average of 578.
- **A2** (The time taken from the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved): 162 days. This

is a 12% improvement against the previous reporting period (184) and compares against a national average of 226 days and our statistical neighbour average of 222.

4.3 Child related data

- In the first six months of this reporting year (1st April – 30th September 2017) seven children were adopted. In the second six months of this reporting year (1st October 2017 – 31st March 2018) two children have been adopted, bringing the total number of adoptions for the year 2017/2018 to nine.

- At the 31st March 2018, there were twelve Looked After Children with an adoption plan who had not yet been adopted. The details of these children's cases are as follows:
 - Six children are placed for adoption;
 - One child is due to be matched for adoption at the May Adoption Panel
 - One child has been potentially linked with Brent approved adopters.
 - Of the four remaining children, three are still in the court arena and although an adoption ADM decision has been made, these children are not yet subject to a Placement Order. The fourth child is subject of a Placement Order, but family finding has been delayed due to specific medical reasons requiring further professional assessment.

4.4 Adopter Recruitment

At the 31st March 2018 Brent had 5 approved adoptive households waiting for an adoptive placement and where a child had not yet been matched or placed.

In response to the need to recruit Somali adopters, contact was made with various organisations which support the Somali community in Brent and wider London area. Organisations that were included in this outreach were: Somali Advice and Forum of Information (SAAFI); Jazari Community Centre; and the Brent Somali Community Centre in Harlesden.

A street poster advertising campaign promoting LGBT Adoption and Fostering Week 2018 went ahead for two weeks during 27 Feb to 13 March 2018.

During National Adoption Week in October 2017, a press release was issued promoting the need to recruit more 'forever families' for siblings, and encouraging people to attend the next information evening. On social media,

people were also encouraged to use the hashtag #supportadoption during this week.

Impact: During this reporting period the service received 26 general enquiries about adoption with one proceeding to full assessment. Other enquiries were received in relation to step-parent adoption (4) and inter-country adoption (1). Inter-country adoption referrals are referred to the Inter-Country Adoption Centre, a specialist Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA) with whom a service agreement is in place.

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 either of Asian, African Caribbean, White Irish or White European heritage.

There have been three new adoptive families approved during this reporting period.

At 31st March 2018, there was:

- 1 assessment in Stage One of the process
- 1 assessment in Stage Two of the process

Two assessments that were in Stage One did not progress to Stage Two of the process.

Also, in this reporting period, two Brent adopters were matched with Brent children and one Brent adopter was matched with a child from another local authority. Another Brent adoptive family have been linked with a sibling group of two from another local authority and are being matched in April 2018.

4.5 Adoption Support

- During this reporting period a number of new families have requested post-adoption support. During this period, ten applications to the DfE Adoption Support Fund (ASF) were successfully approved to support the therapeutic needs of Brent families. In the past six months a number of ASF applications have been completed on behalf of a wide age-range of children. All but two of these applications were in relation to children already known to our service. There are currently eight adoption support assessments in process, which will be resulting in applications for therapeutic intervention for these families in 2018-19. The total number of ASF applications for 2017/2018 was 24, none of which were refused.

There were 14 applications between April – Sept 2017 and 10 applications from October 2017 – March 2018.

- Forty-eight 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 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 in Brent remains the same as recorded in previous reports to the Corporate Parenting Committee. After the upcoming May local elections, councillors will determine which elected member will sit on the panel. 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.

5.3 A joint annual training day for adoption panel members and the adoption team staff is held as required by statutory regulation; the last one was delivered on 6th October 2017 by an independent trainer. The focus was on 'Unconscious Bias', that aimed to improve the quality of the assessments coming through panel, the robust quality assurance of those reports by managers, and the independent scrutiny of those assessments by panel members. Due to the low volume of assessments being presented to panel it is not yet possible to evaluate the full impact of this training – it will be measured throughout 2018 as assessments are presented. The next training day is scheduled for the end of 2018. The focus is likely to be the future role of local authority officers and panels in adoption given further developments in the regionalisation agenda.

5.4 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) who ensures this is given to the Head of Service (LAC and Permanency) and Service Managers for follow up with individual staff or, should the issues be more systemic, broader service improvement.

5.5 During the period 1st October 2017 – 31st March 2018, 5 panels were held with 12 cases discussed during these sessions. Within this group:

- Three households were recommended as suitable to adopt;

- Three individual children were recommended to be placed for adoption with specific carers (two of which were matched on the same day to two of the newly approved families above, minimising any delay);
- Five children were matched long-term with their foster carer (4 of whom have significant additional needs, including ASD and ADHD – a significantly positive outcome for each of them)
- One prospective adoptive family resigned from the process due to a change in their home circumstances.

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

6.0 Service Improvement

- Brent's first Child Appreciation Day is currently being organised for a child being matched with adopters at May's Adoption Panel. These days aim to bring all professionals working with the child to meet with prospective adopters, share information and show appreciation of the child's journey. BAAF Coram have produced guidance on the organisation of Child Appreciation Days, which we will be closely following.
- Quarterly support groups have been established for Special Guardians (SGO carers) with feedback from attendees being positive. The focus of the team will be to encourage more SGO carers to take up this opportunity for mutual support and advice.
- Over the December holidays a first festive party for Kinship Carers and their children was held. Those who attended made a thank you card, which they presented to staff on the day as a sign of their appreciation.
- Additional support will be provided to the birth families of adopted children to supplement the existing individual case allocation. From April 2018 a monthly drop-in service will be established to allow birth families to receive assistance in writing letters to the adopted young person, as part of the existing 'letterbox exchange'. Birth families face many barriers to completing these letters, but it is a good way to maintain a connection between the adopters and birth families. Adopted young people are able to form a more accurate picture of their birth family and have the opportunity to ask questions which might arise about their history.

6.1 Involving Adopters

- Brent Adoption Service held its customary festive party for adopters and their children, which was enjoyed by all. One of our adopters was involved in helping with the delivery of the event by providing face painting. The children enjoyed taking part in a range of party games and craft activities.
- Brent adopters are regular speakers at Adoption Preparation Groups and always provide a balanced account of their adoption journey and the joys and challenges of adoption.
- A number of Brent adopters and other local authority adopters who have adopted Brent children are involved in 'buddying' up with other adopters in order to provide mutual support.

6.2 Adopter Feedback

During this reporting period, Brent Adoption Service received positive feedback from service users. One of the adoptees who received post adoption support from the service said:

"Anyone who walks through your door, whatever their situation, is lucky to have you dealing with their case."

In another case, one of the adopters who was matched with a child commented on how thorough the matching process was and how well she had been supported:

"The team were supportive and encouraging through the small number of what we thought were disappointments, before we were chosen to become M's parents... and now we look at the families that were chosen (as we know most of them) and realise...so those other matches were also really well chosen.

We received so much support especially..."

No complaints were received about the Adoption Service in this reporting period.

7. Broader adoption issues and the future

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- As stated in the previous report to the Committee, the DfE has capped the amount of financial support available to individual children through the ASF.

This has had an impact on some of our families as the projected therapeutic support package costs are in excess of £5k, meaning that support arrangements in these cases have to be modified and renegotiated. Although the cap on the Adoption Support Fund continues to be an issue for some families with a very high level of need most of our adopted children are able to receive relevant therapeutic input within the £5,000 limit. The therapeutic agencies that are currently used are, in the majority of cases, able to manage services within the existing resource.

7.2 Adoption Regionalisation

7.2.1 The work to establish a London Regional Agency (LRAA) is on-going. The latest update from the LRAA Project Team has recommended to authorities a model based on an enhanced version of the 4 adoption consortia already in existence. This will form a 'hub and spoke' approach with a number of services centralised within a central hub office. LB Ealing has agreed to take the lead for the West London region. It is anticipated that new arrangements will be in place by April 2019. The plans will be taken through the appropriate governance routes within the Council to secure cabinet approval to move forward with regionalisation before the end of 2018 to allow sufficient time for implementation.

Report sign off:

GAIL TOLLEY

Strategic Director of Children and
Young People