



Corporate Parenting Committee
30 October 2018

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

Brent Adoption Service Report

1 April – 30 September 2018

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision: (only applicable for Cabinet, Cabinet Sub Committee and officer decisions)	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 1st April – 30th September 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 The 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 Since the realignment within Brent's Looked After Children (LAC) and Permanency Service in early January 2018, adoption services are fully delivered by the Adoption and Post Permanence Team. This team is 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 and the undertaking of step parent and private adoption assessments as directed by the Court.
- Family finding for children with an adoption plan; statutory social work responsibility for some children subject to a Placement Order up until Adoption Order (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 May 2018, covering the 3-year period 2014-2017.

Adoption Scorecards (published [here](#))

4.2 The non-published data for the period 2016-2018 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): 354.6 days. This is a 6.4% improvement against the previous reporting period (378.7) and compares against a national average of 520 days and our statistical neighbour average of 560.

- **A2** (The time taken from the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child for adoption and a match being approved): 150.1 days. This is a 7.4% improvement against the previous reporting period (162) and compares against a national average of 220 days and our statistical neighbour average of 220.

4.3 Child related data

In the first six months of this reporting year (1st April – 30th September 2018) three children were adopted. In the second six months of this reporting year (1st October 2018 – 31st March 2019) it is anticipated that up to five more children will be adopted. There are currently three ongoing adoption applications in Courts, with two more expected to be submitted in the next reporting period. As at 30th September 2018, there were twelve 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
- The plan for one child is to be adopted by his current foster carers.
- One child is waiting for a match with extensive family finding in progress.
- The six remaining children are still being considered within the court arena and although an adoption decision has been made by Brent's Agency Decision Maker plans cannot be progressed until a Placement Order is made by the courts.

4.4 Adopter Recruitment

As of 30th September 2018 Brent had 5 approved adoptive households waiting for an adoptive placement and where a child had not yet been matched or placed.

During this reporting period the service received 23 general enquiries about domestic adoption resulting in one couple, who are already Brent approved adopters for a Brent child, proceeding to a full assessment as 'second time' adopters. There were 5 further enquiries related to step-parent adoption. As in the previous reporting period, Brent is continuing to see an increase in the volume of step-parent and private adoption applications, which is also the experience of other local authorities in the West London Consortium. 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, African or White European heritage.

There has been one new adoptive family approved during this reporting period.

As of the 30th September 2018 there was:

- 1 assessment in Stage One of the process
- 2 assessments in Stage Two of the process
- 4 ongoing step-parent/private adoption assessments

Also, in this reporting period, one Brent adoptive household was matched in April 2018 with a sibling group of two children from another local authority. The children were placed with them in May 2018. In September 2018 another Brent adoptive household had a child from another local authority within the Consortium placed with them on a 'Fostering for Adoption' basis.

Increasing adopter numbers

The national picture in adoption for some time has been an imbalance between the number of children waiting for adoptive placements and approved adopters, with an extremely large number of adopters waiting for a relatively small number of children. As such, many local authorities slowed their recruitment activity to redress the balance. Given the plans for Regionalisation of adoption services across England (see **7.2 Adoption Regionalisation** below) this has now changed and all local authorities are open for new enquiries. To support ongoing recruitment an advertising campaign on the J C Decaux boards is planned to coincide with National Adoption Week (15th – 21st October 2018).

4.5 Adoption Support

In the six months between 1st April – 30th September 2018, 3 new families requested post adoption support bringing the total number of families being actively worked with to 26. During this period, 17 new applications to the DfE Adoption Support Fund (ASF) were successfully approved to support the therapeutic needs of Brent families. In the past 6 months a number of DfE ASF applications have been completed on behalf of a wide age-range of children. 5 of these applications were in relation to adoptive families, who had not previously accessed therapeutic support from Brent. 2 of them were for young people under a Special Guardianship Order, who also receive

support from the team and are eligible for this government funding. There are currently 2 adoption support assessments and one SGO assessment in process, which will be resulting in applications for therapeutic intervention for these families in the next few months. 13 kinship placements are being supported by the team.

27 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. There were a further 26 enquiries from other Adoption Agencies seeking information on whether files were held by Brent.

As stated in the previous report to the Committee, the DfE has capped the amount of financial support available to individual children through the Adoption Support Fund. This has had an impact on some 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 adopted children are able to receive relevant therapeutic input within the £5,000 limit.

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, with the addition of a new council representative following the local elections in May 2018. 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 per statutory regulation; the next one is scheduled for December 2018, the focus of which is the role of local authorities in adoption moving forward, given the Regionalisation agenda set out by the government and coming into force by April 2019.

- 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’s Services) 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 April – 30th September 2018 only 2 panels were held with 2 specific adoption cases discussed during these sessions. The panel also considers long-term permanency arrangements for children who will remain in foster care. The low numbers of panels within this period reflects the reduction in Looked After Children numbers and the ongoing relatively low numbers of children for whom an adoption plan is recommended.

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

6.0 Service Development

- The Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS) that includes consideration of adoption services took place in May 2018. The feedback from the Inspector who spent a day with the team was very positive, especially in relation to the high quality of Life Story Work for children with an adoption plan and the direct work that is undertaken in preparation for a child’s transition to an adoptive placement. The overall graded judgement for Children in Care and Care Leavers, within which adoption is considered, was ‘outstanding’.
- **Regionalisation of adoption:** the work to establish a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) between Brent, Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea, Westminster, Hounslow, Ealing and Hillingdon councils is on-going with the rate of progress increasing significantly during this reporting period. Ealing has agreed to host the project, with Brent taking a leading role by co-ordinating a number of planning meetings to ensure there is direct involvement in every aspect of the creation of the model. These included staff engagement meetings where staff were informed about the developments and how this work would affect their employment status.
- An information and engagement session was held for Lead Members across London and senior leaders in October 2018 to ensure details of progress was

shared. Brent's Lead Member, Strategic and Operational Directors attended this session.

- Currently the detailed business plan is being developed by a project co-ordinator on behalf of the 7 boroughs with the intention that this will be presented to Brent's Cabinet in January 2019. The new RAA model will be implemented incrementally from April 2019.
- Given that all decisions regarding permanency will remain in-house for each local authority but all prospective adopters will be assessed and supported in the RAA, the links between Brent and the RAA are vital. Logistical meetings with HR and IT leads have been held and the model is being finalised.
- The West London RAA will include support for SGO carers that will enable better joint commissioning of post-permanency support services in order to achieve more cost effective service delivery.
- **Support for special guardians and kinship carers:** The Adoption and Post-Permanency Team holds quarterly support groups for Special Guardians (SGO carers). Those attending have feedback positively. Consultation is taking place with current kinship carers to establish how they would prefer to obtain support from each other – whether this by through group attendance or online forums.
- **Brent's first Child Appreciation Day** was held in May 2018 for a child who was matched with an adoptive family 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. The day was a great success and feedback received from everyone who attended was very positive. Lots of very special anecdotal information was shared about the child and her birth family, which the adopter will be able to pass on to her in the future. As well as the detailed information that was shared on the day, a beautiful notebook was passed round for each attendee to write their special thoughts and feelings about the child, which will be part of the contents of her memory box for the future. Everyone who attended talked about how invaluable the day had been and these days are certainly something that Brent will be repeating with other children being placed for the adoption in the forthcoming months.

6.1 Involving Adopters

- Picnics were held for Brent’s adopters and Kinship Carers during the summer months. These were very well attended and received positive feedback from the adults and children. Face-painting, water fights and two youth workers kept the children engaged at the Adopter’s Picnic, whilst the Kinship Carers had henna tattoos and an adventure playground to entertain everyone. The adults enjoyed the opportunity to speak with each other and both events continued significantly beyond the expected finish time.
- Many Brent adopters and also some local authority adopters who have adopted Brent children are involved in ‘buddying’ up with other adopters, which provides invaluable support.

6.2 Adopter Feedback

During this reporting period, Brent Adoption Service has continued to receive very positive feedback from the service users. No complaints were made about the Adoption Service during this reporting period.

Report sign off:

GAIL TOLLEY

Strategic Director, Children and Young People