

# LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

**Meeting of the Executive**  
13 December 2004

## Report from Director of Social Services

For action/information

Wards affected:  
All

### Report Title: Adoption and Permanency Policy

Forward Plan Ref: SS-04/05-24

#### 1.0 Summary

1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform members of the Adoption and Permanency Policy and the Statement of Purpose for the Adoption Service in Brent. The Statement of Purpose is required by the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003. The policy is broader than the statement of purpose in that as well as adoption it covers long term fostering, kinship placements and residence orders. The full detail of the policy and Statement of Purpose is presented in Appendices 1 and 2 which accompany this report.

#### 2.0 Recommendations

2.1 That members agree the Adoption and Permanency Policy and the Statement of Purpose.

#### 3.0 Detail

3.1 At the 30 September 2004, 383 children and young people were looked after by Brent, 262 of whom had been looked after for one year or more. The importance of finding stable and lasting placements with permanent substitute families for those children in public care who cannot return safely to their birth parents is highlighted by specific government standards and objectives on adoption and long term foster care. Its significance is also recognised within the Placements Service in Brent Children's Services. Success in permanent family placement involves not only finding a family and placing the child, but also ensuring that the placement continues into adulthood and provides a child with a 'family for life'.

- 3.2 Adoption provides a secure legal status for the child and the new parents and contributes to their sense of permanence and stability. The child usually takes the family name of the adoptive parents, inherits from them, and loses all legal ties to the birth family, although quite often adopted children may continue to have contact with members of their birth family. It is possible for means tested adoption allowances to be paid to adopting parents if it would not be possible otherwise for them to adopt the child.
- 3.3 Brent currently has 15 children placed for adoption. There is a further 7 children for whom adopters have been found and who will be placed following the approval of the Adoption and Permanency panel.
- 3.3 Another legal route is via long term fostering where specific families are recruited for children whose rehabilitation to birth parents has not proved possible, there are no other family members able or willing to assume parental responsibility and for whom adoption is not considered to be in the children's best interests. Adoption may not be possible because the child has a strong bond to the birth family, or because of the need for siblings to be kept together. There is a shortage of adopters for older children and a shortage of adopters for older children of black or dual heritage origins.
- 3.4 A fostering allowance is paid for the child. This is not means tested. There is an expectation that long term carers will be involved in supporting and caring for children until at least '18 years and beyond'. In reality, this may mean that carers are asked to care for children beyond 18 years via the 'My Place Scheme' where they offer board and lodgings and receive a reduced allowance for the young person. This enables the young person to continue with their education, training or employment in a supportive family environment.

There are currently 44 children placed with long term carers.

- 3.5 Family and friends fostering also offers the stability of alternative family life, but not a total severance of legal ties. Fostering Network research (1999) strongly suggests that wherever possible the placement of choice for most children and young people is with their family or friends. Further research (Kosensen1993 and Child Welfare League of America1994) goes on to suggest that this type of care is likely to be more successful than when a child is placed with stranger carers. This is because the child will be staying within his or her own community, have the same friends and health care support, and often attend the same school. In most cases Family and Friends foster carers should be considered as the first option for the above reasons and also because it will often prevent the break up of the family. Religious and cultural rituals and traditions will continue to be part of a child's life and were the placement is short term the chance of a successful return home is greater.

- 3.6 There are currently 42 children placed with Family and Friends Foster Carers, about half of whom are placed permanently. This compares with 29 children in June 2003 and is the fastest growing group of carers for children needing both short and long term care. A fostering allowance is paid for the child.
- 3.8 Residence Orders regard residence and parental responsibility as quite separate concepts and, as such, can offer flexible shared care arrangements. The making of a residence order in favour of one parent does not take away the parental responsibility from the other, nor from either parent when a third party acquires parental responsibility. The child does not change his or her family name and is not looked after by the local authority. Most other applicants have been female relatives of the children. In the cases where the local authority initiated proceedings, means tested financial support is offered, along with the possibility of additional support from the Children and Adolescents Mental Health Service (CAMHS), educational input, neutral contact venues and supervised contact arrangements.
- 3.9 There is evidence in Brent to suggest that Residence Orders are a good alternative long term arrangement for children, particularly when the length of the order is extended from 16 years to 18 years in 'exceptional circumstances'.

There are currently 46 children placed on Residence Orders.

#### **4.0 Financial Implications**

- 4.1 Weekly allowances are paid to long term foster carers, family and friends carers and a means tested allowance to adopters and those holding Residence Orders. Adopting this policy and statement of purpose will not incur any additional costs. However, current costs are outlined as follows:

<b>Age Band</b>	<b>Long term fostering</b>	<b>Family and Friends fostering</b>	<b>Adoption</b>	<b>Residence Orders</b>
0-4 years	£133.63	£133.63	£123.43	£123.43
5-10 years	£152.36	£152.36	£142.26	£142.26
11-15 years	£189.73	£189.73	£179.53	£179.53
16+	£241.74	£241.74	£231.54	£231.54

#### **5.0 Legal Implications**

The statement of purpose complies with the requirements of the Local Authority Adoption Services (England) Regulations 2003 and the Fostering Regulations 2002 and fulfils the Agencies duties and responsibilities as set out in standard 1 of the Adoption National

Minimum Standards and the National Fostering Minimum Standards under ss23(1) and 49(1) of the Care Standards Act 2000.

## **6.0 Diversity Implications**

- 6.1 The proposals in this report have been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment. The assessment of the policy is that it is not discriminatory in itself, but the following observations are important to note.
- 6.2 Out of the 383 looked after children, the highest proportion (51%) are in the ethnic group of Black, that is, Black Caribbean, Black African and Black other. This compares with only 26.4% of all children in Brent from the same ethnic groups. Children in this ethnic category are therefore over-represented in the looked after population. There is evidence that this group do wait longer for permanent placements with stranger carers (ie, adoptive parents, long term foster carers). However, their hierarchy of needs are regularly reviewed and their need for permanent families will over-ride a perfect racial and cultural match. Officers try and tailor advertising to draw applicants specifically for this group of children. Radio advertising brings particular success in recruiting Black prospective carers. Officers also continue to make specific efforts to place children with family and friends first and foremost where possible and have had some recent success in assessing two Black fathers and supporting them to apply for Residence Orders.
- 6.3 Children with disabilities also wait longer for suitable families and sometimes spend longer in residential care than is preferred whilst they wait. Enhanced rates are paid to carers who look after children with complex needs. Complex needs include learning disability, physical disability, sensory impairment, severe or chronic illness, and emotional or behavioural difficulty.

## **7.0 Staffing Implications**

- 7.1 The policy will be implemented within current level of staffing. There are no additional staffing implications.

## **Background Papers**

Fostering Services Regulations 2002

Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003

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